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The World of Wonderful Reality

by E. Temple Thurston

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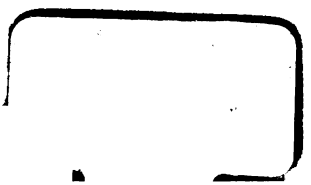

The WORLD of WONDERFUL REALITY

Books By E. Temple Thurston

The City of Beautiful Nonsense
The World of Wonderful Reality
Enchantment
The Five-Barred Gate
The Passionate Crime
Achievement
Richard Furlong
The Antagonists
The Open Window
The Apple of Eden
Traffic
The Realist
The Evolution of Katherine
Mirage
Sally Bishop
The Greatest Wish in the World
The Patchwork Papers
The Garden of Resurrection
The Flower of Gloster
Thirteen

The WORLD *of* WONDERFUL REALITY

BY

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

AUTHOR OF

"THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE"

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK 1919

KE 4126

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To

MY WIFE

My Dear,

Ten years have raced and lingered since first I began in my small room over the tobacconist's shop to write "The City of Beautiful Nonsense." We have seen many sized rooms since then and doubtless have learnt much of each other in many dwelling places. If I have learnt anything it might be phrased something like this—it is the occupancy that makes the room—the company that makes the road. So let me thank you here for every single year of that ten.

Yours always,

E. T. T.

Whatever company I take,
  Whatever highway I am shown,
By night-time or at morning-break
  It is my charge to walk alone.

Whatever friend stretch out his hand,
  Whatever love the bolt unbars,
I wander in a foreign land
  Between the furrow and the stars.

Whatever hands shall make my bed,
  Whatever beck'ning voices cry,
The more let me hold up my head
  When I go out alone to die.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is now more than ten years ago that "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" was written, and much water has flowed under the bridges since then. Many times in the last six of those ten years I have been urged to write a sequel to that story. There was an inconclusiveness about its ending I was told, which, while it may have completed the color in its texture of romance, still left threads for raveling which I had not attempted to secure. Jill Dealtry in the emotion that came to her at the death-bed of Thomas Grey, had given her heart and her life to John. Love, there on the Venice lagoon, had made its conquest over expediency. She had put aside all thought of the marriage of convenience with her father's friend. In that atmosphere of Romance, love and all the glamour of life were triumphant.

Perhaps that was the secret of the book's success with the public. It must be true of people in general that they love to dream a moment in a sleepless world—they need at times to get away from the insomnia of facts. I feel confident that the majority of people reading "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" had little desire when the book was finished to know how John Grey in his two rooms in Fetter Lane and living, as the poor do, by the grace of mercy of the pawn-shop was going to keep a wife. I am sure they did not worry their heads about it. They read it as

a dream, and they accepted it as a dream, and as a dream it was worth while to just so many as it brought the consolation of sleep.

There must as well have been a great many people who disliked "The City of Beautiful Nonsense." To many, from the first page to the last, it had not the faintest conception of reality, and indeed has earned for me the classification of sentimentalist. I have no more reason to complain of that than would another have, if with persistent indiscrimination, he were always called a realist.

A great friend of mine—an author whose work I admire more than that of any other writer to-day—has expressed much the same opinion about "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" to me. He has no sympathy with the book. The absence of reality in its conception offends the deepest purpose in his soul, but being no hand myself at explanation by word of mouth, he remains in ignorance of the deepest purpose in mine.

I realize now then that what I am writing is neither more nor less than that explanation I have withheld. Being a real friend, he can tell me he dislikes the book, and, being sure of his honesty, I can be sincerely glad of a genuine opinion. For I realize that the same opinion is in the minds of a good many people who have not the advantages of friendship to give it words.

To begin with, then, "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" was never meant to touch reality in the sense of such things as happen in a work-a-day world. John Grey, however real he may be in his peregrina-

tions between Kensington Gardens, the pawn-shop and Fetter Lane, is intended to symbolize in the attitude of his mind those dreams and visions whose substance is much of that which is to be found in a prayer.

I believe that all people pray, whether it be while they are having a hot bath in the morning, or when they stand in the midst of the barbaric solemnity of the duomo of Venice. Prayer is inevitable, and with prayer go all those dreams and visions by whose agency we see the world just a little better than in a distressing moment it happens to appear to be.

That whole story of John Grey's love affair with Jill Dealtry is intentionally a symbol of the power of vision, the susceptibility to dreams, which carries so many with a look of youth in the eyes through to the ultimate deliverance.

This is the meaning, as I purposed it, of "The City of Beautiful Nonsense." This is why it seems to me many have cared for the book. This is why many more have objected to it, because they found themselves sufficiently confident in their world to dispense with the efficacy of prayer, the magic of dreams or the virtue of visions.

To write a sequel, then, to a story with that intention was something like purposing to go to sleep in the hope of repeating a dream that once had come to you with a sense of joy. I felt it was impossible to do it, and for three or four years resisted all suggestions that I should make the attempt. The War, however, has brought us different points of view, different ranges of perspective. In the last two years

I have felt, not only that it could be done, but that I wanted to do it in order to achieve a sense of completion.

Dreams, in their intangible way, are real things. They have a meaning in our lives, however elusive that meaning may be. I had always felt that and had wished to leave the dream of "The City of Beautiful Nonsense" where it was, untouched and undisturbed. And then, some one day or another, I found the realization in my mind that the meaning of a dream is never apparent till one wakes up. Once I had thought that, the purpose of a sequel became a tangible business. Could I wake up my John Grey and still keep a sense of beauty in the meaning of his dream? Could I wake him up to reality without shattering the substance of his vision? Could I break his heart beneath the weight of things that happen without destroying his belief in prayer?

I felt if I could do that, then I could write a sequel, and so I began, with what result is to be found in the pages that follow.

Without prejudice, I think I can say there is no difference in the atmosphere or treatment of the two stories. All that differs is the purpose, which in this volume is to give to a dream its link with reality.

An author's vision of his work is necessarily strained, somewhat shortsighted and a prey to his emotions about it. I have not the faintest idea whether I have succeeded or failed in my purpose. All I am certain of is the intention which I have set out in these pages.

THE AUTHOR.

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The WORLD of WONDERFUL REALITY

Chapter I: *The World of Wonderful Reality*

IN a work-a-day world, you must contrive your City of Beautiful Nonsense out of just that material which is indigenous to the soil of your environment. Where in Venice they built in marble and burnished it all gold with the liquid glory of the Italian sun, in London we build in brick and stone and blacken it with all the falling soots of heaven.

Of such matters of necessity, there is only this to be said—that gold of Venice may sometimes seem a tawdry gilt while all the blackened stones and bricks of London can steal a glow of pearl out of the misty sky; can wear a bloom of azure gray that makes it seem—in dingy streets—as if the feet of God were walking only distant by a web of smoke.

It all lies in the eyes that forever must look up and down, up and down, until they need and earn their sleep.

And last of all—for like the clergyman with his sermon, no less than the woman with her postscript, there is always some matter of importance to be divulged as soon as ever the last word be given—last of all it must be explained that the City of Beautiful Nonsense is no other than that native town, wherein is kept the registration of your birthright.

You move your dwelling place. Again and again you move. But still after years and years, in one amongst a row of volumes on the shelf in the vestry of your parish church, there is inscribed the record of your birthright, wherein is sealed your claim to all the beauties of earth and sky.

You, born in all your nakedness, with perhaps one width of your mother's flannel petticoat for your swaddling clothes, a leaking roof in the slummy outskirts of the town to shelter your head, the parish pump at which to wash your face, have yet that right to all the beauties of the sun at morning as it comes above the world, of the sun no less at evening when it falls below the earth.

You are as rich in your heart as the heir to kingdoms is rich in pocket. For while, as it may be said, you are born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards, it is that sorrow of forgetting your native town, forgetting that birthright of your riches which is written in the dusty book. It is the sorrow of that tendency of man to close the gates of his birthplace as he sets forth into the world and to lock himself out forever.

I know a man who, hearing the sound of cowbells in the Swiss valleys, bought some for himself and brought them home that he might tinkle them on dreary days and think of the sunrise warm on the mountain snow, of the valleys green with their luscious grass.

It occurred to him after a while how poor a substitute for the sound it was to shake them in his hand himself, wherefore he conceived the idea

of having a cow of his own and attaching the bell to her neck. Though he had four acres of paddock land with his little cottage in the country, this idea had never appealed to him before. It was the bells that had suggested it. The next Saturday, in the nearest market place, he bought a Guernsey cow.

On summer evenings he would lie in bed, those moments before sleep when all the quiet thoughts come to you like John the Baptists in the wilderness of your mind, the forerunners of your dreams. So he would lie listening to the sound of the tinkling bell, as only a beast can tinkle it, such time when she moves from one sweet tuft of grass to another, grazing after the heat of the day.

That Guernsey cow gave beautiful milk, abundant in cream. It was more than he needed for himself. Why did he not make his own butter they asked him. Why, indeed?

He bought a churn and pans to separate the milk. He bought a wooden stamp, concaved with the figure of a majestic swan. He bought Scotch hands as well.

It became apparent then that the Guernsey cow did not yield enough for butter and milk as well, moreover her produce diminished as the weeks went by. He must buy another cow and he bought another. Then there was more than enough for his needs. He had butter to sell and he sold it, and the first time he received payment for his pounds of butter was like finding a piece of silver in a field of meadow grass. So much was it like finding it, that the desire became imperative to find more.

He took a small farm—eighty acres, no more—eighty acres of pasture land that were all his own, when he discovered that the law of trespass for which he had always had contempt when he read the forbidding notice on those boards across the countryside, became a real law, protecting him and something that was his. He used to feel that the boards were like policemen, holding up their hands before the eager traffic of his soul, whereas now, he knew them to be the power of the law safeguarding his property from marauding hands.

One summer afternoon, walking through one of his meadows put down for hay, when the glittering dust of the buttercups was splashed like gold-foil over his boots, he found two little children. They were picking daisies and that shivering grass which hangs up little bells of seed on almost invisible wires and tinkles them to the first whisper of a breeze.

"Who gave you permission to come into this field?" he asked.

They stood up, clutching their bunches of daisies and looking from one to the other for, from the dread sound in his voice, they dared not look at him.

Evidently no one had given them permission. Indeed, who could have done so but he? Yet there is that judicial instinct in most of us, which urges us to assume the offender's innocence before their guilt is proven. This was the first question he was bound to ask, to which, receiving no answer, he continued:

"Did you know that this meadow was put down for hay and that you've been trampling it down, depreciating the value of it with every step you take? Look at the path you've made!"

They found a trembling interest in the corners of their pinafores, bringing him thereby to exasperation; for there they were, culprits caught in the act, refusing him even the satisfaction of answering him back.

"Where did you get in?" he asked them.

They pointed to a gap in the hedge and the next day to preserve his meadow hay, he had a signboard put up in that place where, to all who passed, it read—*"Trespassers will be prosecuted."*

He watched his man putting it up, standing back in some sense of pleasure and satisfaction to regard it when it was fixed.

"Those children think the whole world belongs to 'em," he said.

"That's only because they're young, sir," pleaded his man in their defense. "They won't think that long. They'll grow out of it."

He was just lighting a pipe, but at the sound of those words—they'll grow out of it—he let the match burn out in his fingers.

In three years' time, he had a herd of twenty milking cows and one night, when the worries of sheep at lambing time had robbed him of his sleep for a week or more, he lay tired out on his pillows trying to get his rest. Every few moments, just as he was dozing off, a sound, through the darkness of the night, jarred on his ears and his eyes opened.

For a long while he bore with it in silence, but then at last sat up in bed, when, out of the fullness of despair in his heart, he shouted out:

"Oh—damn those bells!"

It is this evil habit of acquisitiveness, this fatal passion to accumulate rather than simplify, by which a man locks the gates upon his native town and, in all that burning impulse to possess, he flings away the key.

Indeed, this is an idolatrous age. It is not enough to feel beauty. We must possess it. It is not sufficient for it to be in our hearts; we must have it on our mantelshelves. And the moment we place it there, it becomes an idol, when, having thus given ourselves over to false gods, the true instinct of worship has gone like a cloud on the wind out of our hearts.

This, could we but realize it, this fetish of appearances, this is the false religion of the whole world. Beauty and truth, these are the true Gods. There is no need for their images, once they are in our hearts. But with the hearts that are empty —and who shall say how many our civilization has so despoiled—there, before our eyes, are raised the graven images of virtue, where all who worship may be seen and honored by those who pass by.

Every one of us, we buy those cow-bells and bring them home, as though, putting them on our mantlepiece, we had captured for ourselves the green valleys and the mountain snow. Everyone buys them until, creating a market, they are made by the

thousands in Birmingham, when all the beauty of sound we once heard tinkling on those grassy slopes, is reduced to the ugly cries of a clamoring Commerce.

For this in the end is what our modern civilization has brought us to, a cry of Commerce, far into the night when, with my friend, we sit up in our beds and, in all the bloodiness of anger, we shout out:

"Oh—damn those bells!"

One night, out of the City of Venice, there came Jill Dealtry creeping back to London with all so much beauty in her heart as ever a woman has had with which to face the world.

Two days later, after the burial of the little old white-haired lady by the side of his father, John Grey followed Jill. Before forty-eight hours were passed, he walked through Mrs. Meakin's shop, climbing the uncarpeted stairs to his rooms in Fetter Lane.

Chapter II: *The Circus Ring*

LIFE, in moments, has an uncomfortable habit, to put it colloquially, of getting up and looking at you. There is no avoiding its gaze. You may have thought you had tamed and trained it to a definite course of reliable behavior. Like a man with the dog he has brought up from a puppy, you believed your will was the deciding factor. If it stole the milk you have put out for you every evening—and the best-trained dog might do that—you could give it a thrashing or appropriate one of its dog biscuits for yourself. I knew a man who always selected the latter punishment.

Well, you have probably thought Life was much the same as this. You have not been such a fool—possessing as you do the world's wisdom—to believe it incapable of misbehavior, but there has been a confident assurance in your bones that if anything went wrong, you had inherited the power of will to put it right. The clergyman of your parish and the deep, religious convictions of your parents have fostered this belief in you.

"God," they have told you, "may put temptation in your path; He may make Life very hard at times, but you always have free will to exercise for your own salvation."

Telling you this, has been like putting a whip in your hand which you have felt inclined to use upon the first recalcitrant object that comes your way. You feel like the master in the circus ring, having only to crack your whip to be obeyed.

The swagger of mind which accompanies this sensation of opulent volition, deters you from a delicate calculation as to who puts up the tent where your brief performance is to take place. It likewise disinclines you from any examination of the circumstances by which in your polished silk hat, your white breeches and your Hessian boots, you happen to be there at all.

You just take everything for granted—whip, top-boots and all. And then one day, the door which kept the East African Lion in his cage breaks down to his impetuous assault upon it and of a sudden that jolly circus ring becomes a tropical jungle of uncomfortable possibilities, while the whip you have been cracking so effectively in your hand feels like a thread of worsted tied on to the end of a slate pencil.

If that colloquialism can be excused, this might be described in the manner already shown, as one of those moments when life gets up and looks at you.

It was precisely in just such a condition of affairs that John Grey found himself that evening on his return from Venice to Fetter Lane. Mrs. Rowse had left the room tidy in preparation for his arrival. The brass was polished. The old bits of china in the cupboard had been washed. The waste-paper basket was standing indifferently right on top of the

stain on the carpet where the bottle of ink had been dropped. It even assumed an air of being there by accident.

At any other time, John would have stood at the door—he had often done so upon former returns from his travels—he would have stood at the door, saying:

"Not a bad little place, you know—jolly cozy when the fire's lit and a few candles are burning. Pull the curtains and shut the door and get to a bit of work and, Good Lord, I don't want anything better!"

This is the proper, the natural instinct of one returning to his own home after leagues of travel in even the most beautiful corners of the world. I should be accused of such gross sentiment were I to write of the beauties of home, the corner in which one is wont to sit, the faces of the books one is wont to see, the wink in the eye of the brass candlestick to which one has been wont to wink in return; of such gross sentiment should I be accused that I dare not attempt it.

All such beauties, John would have seen at any other time than this. But Life at that moment was getting up and looking at him. The waste-paper basket had lost all its cuteness of deception. It stood there magnanimously over the ink-stain, but no longer concealed it. It was all very well to think of the fire lit and the candles burning, but he knew there were no coals in the cupboard on the landing outside. The candlesticks were candleless. And had he thought of a meal—which after that

long journey on an empty stomach was precisely of what he was thinking—then he knew the oak corner cupboard was empty.

At any other time, as has been said, John would have stood alone at the door, thinking how splendid everything was. But he was alone no longer. Jill and he were to be married. Jill was there by the side of him then and with him was peering into the room which was to be the parlor of her married life.

It was she who saw the ink-stain under the waste-paper basket. It was she who guessed the coal cupboard was empty; she who divined there was not a crumb of food in the house.

She it was, indeed, who had made all the uncomfortable discoveries about that home of his from the very first moment he had entered Mrs. Meakin's shop. There was no real necessity for her to go that way. The private door at the side was for the use of Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Morrell and though there was no linoleum up his stairs, John Grey had an electric bell which went far to making a real gentleman of him. He had, however, chosen to take her this way, and the moment he had done so, had known that she had observed the rabbit skins Mrs. Meakin always kept in the background of her fruiterer's shop. They were only a side line, something to make good when things were bad in Covent Garden. She had seen them all the same in their dark corner. The stain of red merging into the pallid blue had caught her eye. He had hurried her past into the passage.

The worst was over, he thought. But no. Those friendly cats he remembered only by their scuffling frolics on the stairs, were revealed to this spirit of Jill by a penetrating odor it would have been affectation to ignore. He watched the wraith of her face there beside him all the way up the stairs, and were it by the faint tightening of her nostrils alone, he knew that she had noticed it. The word —noticed—occurred to him involuntarily. Had it been himself, he would have exclaimed:

"God! What a stink!"

And with the mere ejaculation, he would have blown it away. It is only when you notice a smell, that it lingers.

Then last of all the empty cupboards, the ink-stained carpet and the cheerless grate. This Jill he had brought with him, the Jill to whom he was to be married, the Jill who was now inseparably a part of himself, made observation of all these things and the worst of it was, he did not know for certain whether she had turned and looked at him with reproach or not.

He was to be married. No doubt had entered his mind as to that. When, therefore, he stood for those few moments at the door looking into the room, Life preceded him in a leisurely manner to get up and look at him—look at him square in the face.

Never had Life behaved in this disconcerting way before. There had, for example, been no responsibility in finding a meal for himself or in replenishing the sack of coals in the cupboard outside when it

happened to be cold on a winter's night. There arose no sensation of pledges broken or any distressful suggestion of honor lost if he had to go hungry for his dinner or sit blowing on his fingers to give him the feeling of his pen.

These were just casual circumstances to be met by a tightening of that buckle at the back of the waistcoat, by burning the whole collection of last week's newspapers and sheets of wasted manuscript, until there was nothing in the grate but layers and layers of feathery black ashes. And even after that, he could go to bed.

This was the cracking of the whip in the circus-ring—an operation which had always appeared so successful in every other contingency.

"Hi! Ho!" you shouted and the lash snapped like a pistol shot, when the old piebald horse of revolving circumstance, which had for the moment seemed indisposed to carry out his advertised gyrations, made on again with that ambling trot of his around the arena. There was always free will. Always you were master in that circus-ring with the canvas of God's solicitude over your head and the flares of a divine providence lighting your sawdust stage.

But as John stood there alone that evening, looking at his rooms in Fetter Lane, he knew it was near the impossible to take a lady from a fashionable house in Kensington to a home where, when a meal was wanting you just asked her to tighten the laces of her stays. In any case, if such a contingency arose she would prefer you to call them

corsets. It would be no less impossible on one of those chill winter evenings to say to her:

"There's no coal in the place, my dear—we'd better go to bed."

It might only be six o'clock, yet just as cold as if it were midnight.

It was in considerations such as these that Life was getting up and looking John in the face. Here was the East African lion well out of this cage and roaring about the arena in a way that would make any ring-master with the toughest whip in the world wonder what the devil he was going to do next.

Riding that night together in their gondola on the Lagoon, with the silver sickle of a moon reaping its passage through a field of stars, with the tinkling sounds of music across the Grand Canal and the vibrations of a man's voice muted by the rippling water as he sang, John had never thought of these things then.

But now, back once more in Fetter Lane and, but for that wraith of Jill, alone with the spitting noise of that eternally dripping tap on the landing outside, with Mrs. Morrell singing as she washed her husband's shirts and Mrs. Brown walking their sitting-room up above while she nursed her baby to its reluctant sleep, it was enough to make any man question that power of will with which God had so generously endowed him.

"What do you say to a lady," he asked aloud, "when there's nothing in the cupboard, when your pockets are empty and you sit shivering as you look at each other, trying to pretend you don't hear each

other rumbling with hunger—what do you say to a lady, then?"

To all whom it may concern, there is no answer. If you come to such a state of catechism as this and carry your sense of humor with you deep in your breast pocket or even worn upon your sleeve, you do much as John did. You whistle a tune as you count out the limitations of your worldly possessions; you shut the door again letting the room and everything that is in it take care of itself and you set off for that little restaurant where, if you do eat more than your fortune's worth, the little waitress will make good your deficit till you come again.

Chapter III: *Le Pauvre Monsieur*

WHERE John dined was largely a matter of circumstance. He knew men in the Martyrs' Club with which it was a matter of choice.

Broadly speaking, there were three places of which in a mild sense he might have been called a habitué. In order of merit to connoisseurs of food—for these people are always glad to hear of a new place—they were as follows: First, the Alcazar Restaurant. You could pay your bill there in gold if you liked and nothing short of brute courage would nerve you to look for change. Dining there once in days of the possession of the fur coat, John had mistaken the price of a full bottle of champagne for a pint. It had been the first time he had ever bought champagne in a restaurant and the mistake which seems incredible was really not so much to be wondered at.

If you have a vague, though more or less accurate, impression that champagne in a wine merchants costs anything from twelve to fourteen shillings a bottle, you will, as like as not, think that twenty-five shillings refers to a magnum on the wine list of a restaurant. There are people with simple

minds like this. They have an implicit faith in human nature.

John had been dining a rising young actor who at any time in the career that was waiting for him might have taken a play of John's. John never had written a play; but once you get a pen in your hand you never quite know what is going to happen.

However it might be, John had regarded that dinner with a certain degree of the honest wisdom of the world. That is not to suggest that he did not enjoy it as well. The Alcazar Restaurant is a notable place and the rising young actor was recognized by many who had seen him on the stage. He had a great disdain of being recognized and, terrifically, John admired the supreme unconsciousness with which he passed through the lounge where one head after another was turned to see him go by.

He could look at a group of people so naturally and with such superb unconcern that you would never believe he had heard their sibilant whisperings, mentioning his name. It was only when people did not recognize him that he seemed to lose his head and become forced and unnatural. Then he would laugh and gesticulate and raise his voice when he talked. And really in those moments—only they were so seldom—he was most entertaining of all.

It was a vastly pre-occupying business, this business of being supremely unconcerned. It takes the deuce of a witty fellow to be entertaining when once he is absorbed with it.

However, this rising young actor was somebody to be giving a dinner to. There was no doubt about

that and John had ordered his bottle of number thirty-eight, as though it were a carafe of water, or, at most, nothing more than a lemon squash.

And then in the lounge, when they were listening to the orchestra after dinner, there came the bill folded in half to preserve the secret of his extravagance. As John glanced at it his heart turned to sickness and beat with a dull throbbing in ten different places at once.

It was two shillings more than he had in his pocket and he had calculated it so carefully, allowing fourteen shillings for the champagne, to admit of tips with a margin of half-a-crown in case of emergencies. And the waiter stood there imperturbably amongst all those people, like a recording angel on the day of judgment. It seemed as though any moment he might lift up his voice and cry through the vaults of heaven to the very throne of God: "Here is one who cannot pay his bill!"

John leant closer to his guest who was gazing with the eyes of oblivion at a party of people nudging each other to look at him. With a rush of instinct he realized his position. The sound of John's voice as he asked for the loan of five shillings was sufficient to reveal to him the awful truth. High on his forehead the blood rushed hot and red. He was dining with a man who could not afford to pay his bill and it seemed at the best as if people must at least be sorry for him.

"Lord, yes! Take what you want!" said he with an open voice—and he fetched out of his pocket a handful of money that jingled in John's ears like

the keys of heaven. There are moments when, if you are a really first-class actor, you must, so to speak, take the situation in both hands and carry it in full view of the audience. Like the actor who was given an onion to eat instead of an apple, and he munched it with such relish it might have been a Cox's Orange pippin.

But once the waiter had departed, the young actor muttered in John's ear: "Why on earth didn't you get them to give you a blank check."

John had not thought of that. Indeed it needs an account at a bank for the idea to occur to one with any degree of promptitude.

This was the place which John visited only on the rarest of occasions. If a man wanted to appreciate the fact that you were giving him something to eat, you took him to the Alcazar Restaurant. Fortunately for him, the most of John's acquaintances were those who were satisfied with a cut from the joint.

And it was at Wrigglesworth's, with its sawdust floor and its parrot in the cage, you could get the best dinner in London. For half a crown, you could have twenty cuts from the tenderest joint in the world, it being assumed that by the time you had had two, together with liberal helpings of potato and cabbage, you were not thinking of the third with the same optimism as when you sat down to your meal.

Ad lib, when it refers opulently to the amount you can eat, are necromantic words. There is no end

of sorcery about them. They conjure up visions which not even a wager could make true.

Yet whenever John had so much as half a crown to spend upon a meal and usually there was an appetite to go with it, those two words succeeded in tricking him every time. *Ad lib!* Well, with that assurance before you, you can at least eat a meal in peace. At the Alcazar, even the seven and sixpenny dinner *prix fixé* came out at twelve shillings a head by the time you had said grace and looked twice round the room.

Here, then, the first two places are easily disposed of. But I could write a whole chapter about the third.

Le Pauvre Monsieur was no place for connoisseurs. Monsieur and Madame Defautin would have been distressed, to say the least of it, had anyone appeared at the door of their dining-room in the immaculate evening dress of the connoisseur. They had not called their little eating-room—The Poor Gentleman—for nothing.

If you want to know, they had called it The Poor Gentleman for the very best reason in the world and there was no more typical an example of their good reason than John himself. Thus they had named it because the poor are everywhere, in every street, in every quarter and wherever they are, there is not one amongst them who would not be thought a gentleman if he could.

Imagine their clientéle! *Le Pauvre Monsieur* was never without its customers. For one of the unwritten principles of the establishment was, that

when once you became a recognized visitor, it was always possible to leave your bill unpaid. To put it vulgarly, you need never go for long on an empty stomach if you were one who frequented *Le Pauvre Monsieur*.

The name of the place and your presence there were Monsieur Defautin's guarantee. You were poor? Well, what more probable than that you could not pay your bill! But you were a gentleman. Then what more certain than that you would come back one day and discharge it when you could.

They always watched your departure on those occasions when your bill was undischarged, smiling and nodding their heads and saying how welcome you would be when you honored them with another visit. But the moment the door closed, I have seen Monsieur turn to Madame, shaking his head and with a certain note of despondency saying to her: "I hope he won't be very hungry before he can afford to come back."

By reason of his being a gentleman, John had sometimes been kept away from their company for weeks together—times when the loaf of bread and an occasional egg from the tallow chandler's shop had had to be enough. But it was like the return of the Prodigal Son when he appeared in the Defautin's establishment again.

The moment his face showed inside the door, Madame was down between the tables like a fat piper doing a sword-dance, and shaking him by the hand. They were mother and father to the greatly poor or the little rich—whichever you like to call them—

were this Monsieur and Madame Defautin. All those who came there to their stuffy restaurant at the back of Dean Street, were their sons and daughters. And whenever they could not pay their bill, these sons and daughters of theirs; whenever they began with the same old excuses of not having brought enough out with them, leaving the premises with that incriminating slip of paper bearing its record against them, it was like a child going out into the world when you are never wholly certain of its return or whether it will not have lost some of its love for you, together with some of its illusions about you if ever it sets foot on the threshold of home again.

I shall say nothing about the cooking at The Poor Gentleman. If you have ever been hungry, you know the full value of the faintest sound of such words as: *Omelette aux fines herbes* or *tournedos* or *filet de bœuf*. The mere appearance of them, scribbled in a spidery French handwriting across the menu is sufficient to make your mouth water.

Unfolding the paper serviette as you sit down, you say: *"Omelette aux fines herbes* and *filet,"* and while you sit waiting for it, you are eating the best omelette and the most succulent filet you have ever tasted in your life. If the omelette is not so wonderfully made after all when actually it is put before you, the appetite you have by that time has ceased to be particular.

That evening on his return from Venice, John made off to these parents of his inner man. There was not even so much as a glass of coffee against

his good name as a poor gentleman. He entered the room, receiving the exclamatory greetings of Monsieur and Madame Defautin with not a twinge of his conscience. Whatever it might happen to be, he could pay for his dinner that night and when you are a poor gentleman you have little need to look further than this.

When once he had shaken them by the hands, when once he had explained the meaning of the band of crêpe on his arm and they had expressed as much genuine grief for his bereavement as a north countryman would get into a lifetime of mourning, Madame Defautin stood back and looked at him.

"You come alone?" she said. "You have no lady as table companion? You eat by yourself?"

He nodded his head.

"Then you shut your eyes, now, quick! Tight! And I show you."

She took him by the elbows and turned him round.

"Now look!" said she.

And he looked.

And there at a table, reading a penny magazine and smoking her American cigarettes between the omelette and the tournedos, was Amber.

"You have not brought her here this three months. Always she comes alone. Bad Man!"

She took him by the arm and whether he were willing or no, led him across the room until he stood before the table. Then Amber looked up.

Chapter IV: *Tournedos and Omelettes*

THE last time they had met was when, in the belief that he was to see no more of Jill, John had gone, a child with the promise of life a broken toy in his hands, asking her to return to him.

"I wonder does the man exist who can bear disappointment without becoming like that," she had said when he had told her everything and with that speculation—as she had meant to do—had sent him back to Fetter Lane alone.

He had not seen her afterwards, sitting on that mattress bed of hers on the drawing-room floor, crying out: "Oh, you fool! you fool!" and beating her hands on her knees, yet glad to be able to be so great a fool for his sake.

For the quality of sacrifice in a woman, once she comes by an understanding of love, is something that is past analysis or calculation. Amber had let him go at the very moment when she had realized she needed him most and would herself have been least able to explain the anomaly of her action.

Love, perhaps, when really it comes to you, has little to do with possession. It is a sense of true worship, and once it listens to the voices of desire, becomes tainted with idolatry. In this manner go love and religion, hand in hand down the same

path; to which statement if you are one of those pessimists of life, you will add—world without end —Amen, and settle yourself down to the comfort of your shortcomings.

Whether it is because women's desires are of a more passive nature—as men would have us suppose and women are only too ready to deny, when the talk turns upon comparative morality—or whether it is that, touching Nature so closely, their hands have grasped the fringe of the garments of God, it would seem they are the more liable to the instincts of true worship when they come to the altar of love. They would have their man a creature of such nobility as none could assail and half the time they are tempting him to frailty, they are hugging the hope he will not succumb.

Amber had sent John off to Venice. Out of some undreamt-of fund in her possession, she had slipped a sovereign into his hand to make up the deficit for his journey. She had known he would not accept. But the mere sight and touch of it, coming from her with all her nagging debts at Barkers and Derry and Toms, she knew would make a talisman of it, in which he would find courage and strength to go.

And when once the hall-door had banged and she knew he was gone out into the street, away down the Earls Court Road, straight to Venice, she had seated herself on the floor, crying out: "Oh, you fool!" Had he come back then, she could never have believed in him, in life or in love so passionately again.

It was here she stood—as in some one moment in life we all stand—at the gates of the temple of idolatry and God knows what hazard it is that flings them open to so many, while it keeps them locked and bolted to those few who sometimes most eagerly desire to pass within.

But John had not come back. She had seen no more of him. As Madame Defautin had truly said, for three months she had dined alone on those occasions when she came to *Le Pauvre Monsieur*. Apparently then she had seen no one until that moment when she looked up from her penny magazine and found John standing before her.

"Good-night!" she exclaimed and shut her magazine and pressed out the burning end of her cigarette because, in the habit of her memory, she knew he did not like smoking at meals between courses and assumed at least that they were going to dine together.

Madame Defautin left them then with such chuckles of satisfaction as if she and she alone had accomplished the most romantic reunion in the world.

For a while Amber could only sit and look at John and John at her as though an absence of three months must have left indelible traces too astonishing to be observed all at once. Then suddenly and simultaneously they became absurdly shy. John got the plait in his spine first. She followed at once with the plait in hers, till it felt to both of them as if their sensations were so raveled and knotted there was no untying them at all.

There was no fact to catch hold of. All they had between them, spread out on the table as it were, was a bundle of memories—days they had spent in the country together at odd, inexpensive little wayside inns, wherever they had happened to be walking along the road; nights when she had left him at Fetter Lane to walk back in the pouring rain to Earls Court because the last 'bus had been gone for hours and the Tube was no more than a tube through the bowels of the earth—these memories, like scraps of paper, lay on the table between them. And it was as if the door were open with the wind blowing through and all they could do was to keep on clapping a hand down on the table to prevent the pieces of paper being blown about over the floor where everyone could read them. Yet again, it was as if some had escaped them, had been blown away, were seen and read by other occupants of that room of Monsieur Defautin; and then, their secret being known, the blood ran up, hot into their cheeks, when they could only just look at each other once and then look away.

At last she, too, caught sight of the band of crêpe on his arm and there was a fact to lay hold of. She leant forward and touched it gently with her hand. That was all the question she needed to ask.

In two moments the plait was untied. He was telling her of the death of his father and mother in Venice. Then came her *tournedos* and his omelette and the effect super-imposed by that three

months' absence had all disappeared. They might have been going back to Fetter Lane together as soon as their glasses of black coffee were empty.

"Didn't you feel it terribly?" she asked.

He looked up quickly from his plate with that odd expression of impulse in his eyes she had seen so many times, most clearly of all when first he had told her about Jill and his ideal.

"No, I didn't feel it like that," he said emphatically. "'Never hamper youth,' that's what my father used to say. 'Cut away the old wood, not the new.' And that's just what it seemed like. I'd never seen death before and I'd thought it would be horrible to look at. It isn't. Not with old people anyhow. Have you ever pruned a rose tree—one of those mornings in March when the sun strikes hot for the first day in the year and it feels as if Summer had somehow slipped its leash and was rushing out to meet you before its time? Have you ever gone out into the garden and pruned rose trees then?"

"Have you ever seen our garden in Earls Court?" she asked him. "Can you imagine the Summer rushing out to meet you in those gardens in Hogarth Road? It 'ud trip up over a clothes line long before it to got to you—and then can't you see the state it 'ud be in?"

He laughed because she could laugh when he knew what gardens really meant to her.

"Anyhow, death's just like pruning," he went on. "You cut off a bit of old wood, but you cut it off just above a bud and instead of seeming like muti-

lation, it's like setting something free. I suppose if I had the pruning scissors to do a job with in Life, I should be exactly like a woman pruning rose trees. I should be so damned sentimental about the old wood that had borne its blossoms, I couldn't have the heart to cut it away. But when you see a gardener who knows his job, just snipping it off above the bud so clean that you know there can't be any pain about it, you realize how pruning is only a necessary process and it's the tree that matters, not the branch. It's the tree that lives and all the gardener cares about is that. If it weren't pruned, it 'ud turn to briar and dead wood and what a dearth of blooms there'd be in the market place then. I only hope the gardener who knows his job will have the pruning of me when my season's over. I don't want to be left to the tender mercy of some old maid who hasn't the heart to part with me and just prunes me to the senile paralysis of a linger death. If there's going to be a flower on my branch I want it to be a bloom worth having and then the sharper the knife the better, and in the proper place just above the bud."

It was odd for her to hear him talking again like that. For a while she could scarcely believe her senses. No one else ever talked to her that way. They might speak of serious matters, but if they did, they spoke direct. Never with pictures. If of death, then of something that appeared in a hearse drawn by black horses, savoring of drawn blinds and musty odors. John talked of death and she saw it no less plainly, but it was something in

a garden and it was clean, as clean as the shoot of a sapling ash and if there were any odor about it at all it was a perfume of clean winds across open places. Yet with all that sentiment and symbolism, he gave her a better comprehension of death than ever she received from others.

Most people, talking about death, wore the mental garb of an undertaker. They followed a hearse instead of an idea; their words were shovelfuls of earth lifted wearily out of a grave. Or they talked like doctors cutting their sentences with a scalpel and disinfecting all traces of sentiment with an atmosphere of iodoform. All were extremely literal. None were intensely true.

But with John it seemed he came at life and no less convincingly, by paths through the open ways of Nature, when life and even death tasted sweet, for which, feeling an unaccountable gratitude, and not thinking what she did, she suddenly leaned forward touching his hand as it lay there on the table. It was only when she felt in his fingers the half-expressed inclination to draw his hand away that she realized what she had done and knew all that must have happened in those long three months while he had been away.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I—just forgot."

"Forgot what?" he asked her.

"Forgot that you were going to be married."

"How did you know I was going to be married?"

Well—how did she know? She did. And so, never having heard that cry of hers—"You fool!" —he started off like his summer from the leash

and told her all the wonderful things that were going to happen to him. It might indeed have been summer escaped from the leash to him. It was the month of March to her.

Chapter V: *Old Times*

SHE listened with rapt interest in her eyes, with sympathetic noddings of her head to the whole story; the parting, because Jill had believed it her duty to marry her Mr. Skipwith; the first meeting again in Venice when his mother had tacitly set her heart upon their marriage; then that brief story of deception when in a series of letters he had described their wedding and the little red house in Harefield where they had settled down.

"Why Harefield?" asked Amber.

"Well, don't you remember," said he, "that day you and I walked to Jordan's and stayed at the Rest House and they said we ought to be Friends and I didn't understand and said we weren't anything else and then they asked us to go?"

They had been serious all through dinner till that moment, but with the memory of this amusing incident, they both leant back in their chairs and shouted with laughter. Everyone in the room turned and looked at them till Madame Defautin, passing behind the back of John's chair, patted his head and leaning over the table, said:

"Old times—old times to hear you laughing, you two."

And that stopped their laughter with a snap.

She might have thrown a bucket of cold water into their faces with less effect.

"But what had Harefield to do with it?" inquired Amber.

"Well—do you remember that little inn we stopped at for lunch and had bread and cheese and shandy-gaff and the woman had a dribbly nose and kept sniffling and saying: 'I know I shall sniff too late one of these days.' Don't you remember? Well—that was Harefield."

She looked at John with a quick glance of her eyes and then she said:

"But why did you tell her Harefield? That was our place."

She could not help it. There was no time to stop herself. The words had sneaked out of her lips, just when the door of her mind was ajar. And she had meant to keep it locked so tight.

They were not fair words to say. She knew that. For as John had described themselves at Jordan's Rest House, so they were—merely friends. They had never said they loved each other. Frankly she had admitted that the day in Fetter Lane when first he had told her about Jill.

"You don't love me?" he had asked her.

And after the instant's pause, she had said "No."

"And I've never told you that I loved you?" he had continued.

And to that, without pause at all, she had rereplied: "No—never," in honesty adding later on:

"If it doesn't last, then nobody's hurt by it; if it does, then let it last as long as it can. I don't want it to end to-day—I might to-morrow. I might see someone I liked better."

This, right or wrong, had been their honest relationship. This, so far as he knew or she meant him to know, had been all that there was between them. When he had talked to her of the person with whom one knew it could last, always, down avenues of time that had no ending, then, what she had seen in a sudden vision had perforce been her own affair. She had waited till the hall door banged, on that occasion when he had come back like a child to her lap, she had waited till the hall door banged, before she had let that cry riot in the stampede of her emotions from her lips. He had never heard that. Yet now, finding in a careless moment, finding the door ajar, these words had slipped out and she was quick to be after them, to catch them none too gently by the arm and drag them back.

John looked over the table at her as though she had struck her hand across his face.

"Have I been unfair—have I been rotten to you?" he asked.

With the tone of his voice and that look in his eyes, she had to slam the door then and swiftly turn the key in the lock.

"Good Lord! No!" she exclaimed. "You? Rotten to me? I didn't mean anything when I said that. Pulling your leg—that's all."

He did look at her then; a quick and he believed

a shrewd scrutiny of her eyes that had simply laughed back into his own.

"Go on," she said. "All those letters. And your mother believed every word of it. Go on."

So he went on with his tale, much as one, thinking he has heard footsteps on a lonely road, stops for an instant, looks round, and then starts on afresh.

The wish not to give her pain may have been part of his belief that he had not. In that state of mind when a man is performing conjuring tricks before an audience every one of which knows how the trick is done, there is no one more capable than a woman of convincing him that he is a damned clever fellow.

Amber convinced him that it mattered little to her whether he had written of Harefield or had chosen the domicile of their married life to have been in her own house in Hogarth Road. And if any man says he was a fool, let him think back to the moments in his own life when, in the desire to be deceived, he has listened to a woman telling him black was white and replying:

"Well, now you come to point it out, I suppose it must be so. Funny! I'd never realized it before."

In the eager desire to tell anyone of the wonder of life that had come to him, it was sheer opulence of good fortune to have found one who could appreciate to the finest degree of an angle the queer perspective of his vision. She knew it would have been a bitter spoiling of that pleasure had she let

him see for one instant that every angle had its point thrust deep in her heart.

"I was only pulling your leg!" she laughed, and on he went in happy ignorance, telling the wonder of his tale.

And when it was all finished, there was this new realization to confide in her; this new discovery he had made as he stood at the door of his rooms in Fetter Lane and wondered what the devil you can say to a lady when there is no food in the house and the coal cupboard on the landing is empty.

Besides all of which, there were the immediate expenses of getting married and to a lady who might reasonably expect a ceremony at the Brompton Oratory if they weren't too busy at Farm Street.

"What's it cost just to get married?" he asked.

Of a sudden Amber was laughing; laughing out of the very secret of her heart, and I wager there is not one single woman reading this chronicle who will pause for an instant to wonder why.

"Get a piece of paper," said she. "Come on—get a piece of paper and let's make a list."

Any woman who really understands a man—and surprising him in a financial embarrassment—will find her way into some corner of his heart, the moment she brings out a piece of paper and proceeds to make a list.

Chapter VI: *Where to Go for a Honeymoon*

A RING will cost a guinea," said John and called Madame Defautin to give him one of those incriminating slips of paper on which in figures it was put on record that you were a gentleman, however poor.

One pound, one shilling, he wrote at the top of the list and then looked up at Amber.

"Don't you think she'd like a better one than that?" she inquired.

John set out to tell her how Mrs. Rowse had informed him on one occasion that her own wedding ring had cost a guinea and in a tone of voice which implied it was by no means the cheapest you could get.

" 'Twas eighteen carats," said John, and it seemed to him when you had said that about a gold ring, there was not much left to talk about in its favor.

"Anyhow," said he, "it's the first item. Better keep it down. We can see what we've got to spare as we go along."

"Yes, but how much have you got altogether?" she asked.

He had made this calculation already. He had made this calculation in the train up from Dover,

after a boy had come round with tea baskets when, counting the silver in his pocket, he had thought it better to go without.

"Without pawning anything at all," said he, which amounted to saying that the sum he was about to declare was a clear net possession, "I've got three pounds, two and sevenpence."

Of course it sounded the devil of a lot. Amber drew a deep breath when she heard it. Measured in one and sixpenny dinners at Monsieur Defautin's, figure to yourself the weeks it would last!

"All right," said she, "go on. You'll have to get a better ring than that."

With a superior fund of common sense when it came to the making of lists, John was not so sure of that.

"It's an unfortunate fact," said he, "that while it is a sin in the eyes of the church for men and women to dispense with the Sacrament of Matrimony, they nevertheless are mulcted of some considerable sum before its observance."

She asked him what "mulcted" meant.

"It's making you pay your bill," said he, "without sending you details of cost. You probably have to pay the priest a guinea and it's no good saying: 'I'd prefer a ceremony for ten and six.' The price is fixed, irrespective of cost. You've no choice. You're mulcted. I can't explain it better than that. It's a charitable word that covers the sins of all iniquitous charges."

Amber wrote down a guinea without any more dispute about it and when he saw those figures

down in their nakedness on the piece of paper, it did not seem so iniquitous after all. For to charge one guinea when you married the woman you loved—which surely was the most tremendous thing in the life of any man—seemed ridiculous beside the fact that a box at the opera cost three. Could the world be said to know what it wanted when it had such a preposterous idea of values as all that?

"The cost to the nation of an Admiral of the Fleet," said John who, when once a thing struck him as odd, left all else to pursue it, "is round about two thousand pounds a year and the public are willing to pay a popular cinema actor as much by the week. I wonder if we know what we want. It 'ud be a damned good thing if this country were ever invaded.'

"It never will be," said Amber. "The Admirals don't look at it that way. Come on, get on with the list."

Well, there was the wedding breakfast, which in their case would amount to lunch.

"Not here," said she.

"No. I'd thought the Alcazar Restaurant, but its all costing more than I thought, so it'll probably be Wrigglesworth's. Even at Wrigglesworth's, it wouldn't be a penny less than ten and six."

She put down ten and six.

"Then I must buy Jill some flowers, if it's only a bunch of violets. And if the occasion's to be treated with any respect, I shall want a new hat."

They looked at the object under threat of con-

demnation, hanging on the peg above their heads. Inclining her head first one way and then another, Amber finally wetted her pencil and wrote down the sum of eight and six.

Out of the corner of his eye, John saw that sum added to the list.

"But can you buy respect?" said he solemnly. "Other people's possibly—not your own. And even were it to be bought, could a new hat be considered to be the best expression of it?"

He looked at her for a sympathetic answer. She looked back at the hat, and said not a word.

"Cross out the hat," said he, "and put down a shilling for violets."

Following this, there were incidental expenses; expenses which defined themselves not so much in detail as in a nameless fear of being found that day confronted with a situation when he had no money in his pocket—and this more for Jill's sake than his own.

They put down incidental expenses at seven and six.

"You might as well have got a new hat," said Amber who, feeling like a mother as well as all the other things in the world a woman does feel, wanted him at least to look his best. Having more experience of the world than she, however, he preferred the seven and six in his pocket than reposing on his head.

Then, after all these incidental expenses were accounted for, there was still the cost of the honeymoon to be taken into consideration.

"To be married without a honeymoon," he declared, "is worse than baptism without a christening mug. I've known people get on reasonably well in the world without a christening mug, but I don't think she'd like the idea of marriage without a honeymoon."

By a honeymoon, he understood a sort of convention of going away. People had to go away so that people who knew should not see them. They would know, for example, in Fetter Lane that he was going to be married. Mrs. Rowse, of course, would give the secret away. Nothing in human nature could prevent her from doing that. She was a woman and women would peep out of heaven to see a wedding go by. And how utterly impossible it would be for him to return to his rooms with Jill, after they had left the church, to find Mrs. Morrell and Mrs. Brown peeping at them over the bannisters. No, there must be a honeymoon.

"But where?" asked Amber, holding her breath in the fear that he might choose the Rest House at Jordans where, being more than friends, they would find a warmer welcome than when he was with her.

There were recognized places, John informed her, where honeymoons should be taken: Paris, the Riviera, Como, Lugano, often Venice. Geographically, it seemed these places had been created for that purpose. Hotels, there, had their honeymoon suites. Waiters knew and took things for granted, which, when you had got over the first shock of their knowledge, was so much better than suspicion.

To have a honeymoon in England, at Brighton or Eastbourne, even to go up into the Lakes was very much in the nature of participating in a detective drama. You felt you were pursued. John Buchan's "Thirty-nine Steps," might just as well has been written about a honeymoon couple in civilized England, as about a secret service agent whose every moment was significant of the business he had in hand.

They did not understand honeymoons in England, mainly because they did not understand love. There is something disgraceful about love in these Islands, consequently there is something verging on immorality about a honeymoon. You have escaped the police, and that is about all that can be said for you. Otherwise it is incumbent upon you, for decency's sake to let as few people as possible know what you are up to. This is certain, you cannot indulge in love on your honeymoon in England. What you get you must steal and God help you if you are found out. Wherefore you sit about on verandas or try and escape into the countryside until the night comes when you can creep out of your disguise like a burglar bent upon nefarious purpose.

But the nights on Como and Lugano for example, they are made for lovers on their honeymoon. The darkness falls over those still waters, not so much because God has divided the twenty-four hours between day and night, as to serve the passionate purpose of two beating hearts. And when at morning, the rising sun spreads its silken rose across the

mountains when the snow flushes with pink, as though the sun had surprised it in all its virgin innocence, it is for the purposes of lovers still.

In that glow of light they wander through the valleys and up the mountainsides. The very windflowers grow for them. The day is their very own and follows the night for no better reason than that even love must have its rest; must bathe in the cold, clear water of the stream, must run and leap in all the exhaustless energy of youth.

Como! Lugano! These were places for a honeymoon! But as John looked at the list, mounting up towards that three pounds two and sevenpence, he wondered if they would be able to get much further than Turnham Green.

"How much does it come to now?" he asked.

With all her ten fingers, Amber made it out to be three pounds and sixpence.

"That leaves two shillings and a penny," said she, with scarce an effort of calculation.

Turnham Green, then, was not so far out. It was possible to conceive it as no further than Shepherd's Bush. But though there might be a whole world of difference between the Lake of Como and Shepherd's Bush—and judging by all accounts there was—there would be no difference in their minds. John believed that. They were lovers on the threshold and whether the door opened upon the whole vista of the Italian Alps or merely into Ravenscourt Park, made only this difference, that they saw before them the whole glory of the world,

or they shut their eyes to the dirty pieces of paper and all the sprawling children on the grass—they shut their eyes and were content to look within.

However, it was not really so bad as all that. The three pounds two and sevenpence, as has been said before, was a net possession. There still remained the whole gamut of things to be pawned.

John paid the bills and stood up from the table.

"Come on," he said, "let's go back. I'll put out all the things I can sell and I bet you we'll have enough to pay for a cockade for the coachman."

Chapter VII: *Pied Piper and Vagabond*

WHILE they had been laughing and talking and making their calculations, it had all grown in Amber's mind to seem as though no barrier had ever been raised between them. John had this quality, not so much a quality of destroying the realities of life as of eliminating the obvious. To be with him, to talk to him was to come into a world where conventions disappeared like rabbits out of a conjuror's hat. You might suppose they were there, but it was an indisputable fact that you lost sight of them.

As many and many a time before, Amber left *Le Pauvre Monsieur* that evening to the sound of Monsieur's and Madame's blessing—no more sincere because the bill was paid and there existed no obstacles to their speedy return. It was not until they came outside into the street and turned the old familiar way towards Fetter Lane, when the chill air blew on her cheeks and wakened her from her dreaming; to be exact, not until she had just slipped her fingers into the bend of John's arm and an old tune had risen unconsciously in her mind to the measure of their steps did she realize what she was doing.

Like a kind of will-o'-the-wisp, he had led her into this fatal morass of her dreams. Like a Pied

Piper, he had played tunes in her ears, not to decoy or deceive, but simply because it was in the tips of his fingers to play a tune wherever he went. It was not music for everyone's ears. Only the few there were who heard it, only the few to follow where it led. But it seemed to her then, with the sound of his happy tunes still dancing in her ears, that they who heard must follow and to the furthest ends of the world.

So, she realized in those moments as they walked back to Fetter Lane, so must Jill have listened; so, too, she must have followed, even from the straight path which Duty had set out before her.

That night with John in Venice, coming this way, going that, across the Lagoon, Amber knew well what tunes he must have made for Jill with his playing. But she had been wise enough to throw all the troubles of Life away and follow the Piper then and there. She had known the quality of his music while Amber had let him go by, ignorant of what she had lost until she heard its echoes in the deep cloisters of her heart.

Well, the fruit to those who picked it! If her heart was empty of music, there still were tunes left to whistle on the lips. He might call for her again to help him make his lists and though it might be in the nature of helping the bride to dress for the bridegroom who has your heart in the hollow of his hands, she yet would be ready if he needed her. And half the tenderness of his music was that it had the note of his wanting in every stave.

She had taken her fingers on the instant from his arm and, all the way back to Fetter Lane, had run her mind up and down these minor scales of thought until they stood before the door in the shadow of Mrs. Meakin's shop. Almost for granted she had taken it that there they must separate; that upon the inside of that door stood Jill with the rights she had won for herself; that so far, to the portal she might come, but no further. Here was her mind making and accepting conventions which it seemed to her must be apparent even to him.

But they were not. Just as though the world had not altered one whit for either of them, he pulled the key out of his pocket and slipped it into the door.

"I haven't got a bit of coal in the cupboard," said he, "but there's an old packing case. We can break that up. It isn't really so cold as that the look of something burning won't warm things up a bit." And he held open the door for her to pass through.

She stood where she was, out there on the pavement and she shook her head.

"I'm not coming up," she said, and tried her best to say it as though on the whole it were too much trouble to mount that flight of stairs.

"Why not?" he asked in genuine surprise; genuinely at a loss to understand what should make her refuse when they had been such good company over the *tournedos* and the omelette and she had shown so much sympathy with his financial difficulties as actually to get a piece of paper and make

a list. "Why not?" he repeated, for never had they been more than friends and in that chance meeting at *Le Pauvre Monsieur* it had seemed to him what a jolly place a world was, where you could fall in with a friend, a close, a dear friend, and go on for a mile or two down the road, talking and laughing as though the essence of life were constancy and nothing could really change.

Then, suddenly, here she was stopping abruptly no sooner had their feet fallen in step. She would moreover vouchsafe no answer to his question, wherefore again and for the third time, he asked: "Why not?"

Then she shrugged her shoulders and laughed, the little odd laugh a woman drops like a pebble into the deep well of your heart; a little laugh that is weighted with tears but which, still like the pebble, is polished and shines in your eyes as it falls, shines with her purpose of not letting you see one of the tears it contains.

"Oh, I don't know," said she. "P'raps I don't want to. P'raps I'd rather go back to Earls Court."

Had John not been so amazed with a sudden revelation of life, he might not so obediently have taken the hand she held out to him. As it was, in a strange bewilderment, he just shook it and let it fall as she went.

"Bless you," she said abruptly, and turning quickly, without once looking back, walked with determined steps down the Lane towards Fleet Street.

He stood there, watching her, somehow aware

that her looking back would be a symbol, a sign that Life had not really changed after all.

"It's just an idea she's got," he kept on telling himself. "Just an idea. She thinks something has come between our being friends. The circumstances have changed, but not the friendship. She doesn't realize that. Circumstances are always changing. Life isn't. Life's always the same. When she gets far enough away, she'll realize how silly it is. Then she'll turn. Then she'll come back. Then she'll—come back. Then—she'll—come—back——"

She had gone. The darkness of the narrow lane had swallowed her up. In the perspective of distance, exaggerated in the gloom, the houses had leant together and hidden her from sight. She had gone and John, still like a child, was taking into his heart, his first lesson of Life.

It was in more than circumstance that there was to be found the element of change. Amber had changed. He scarcely dared to think how deep that change had been. But whatever it was, he was no longer blind to it now. She had not looked back. In the old order of things, had they ever been heated in dispute and parted in anger, she would have looked round before a dozen steps had separated them. On the fly-leaf of one of the books on her bookshelves, there was to be found the inscription:

AMBER
The night of terrible row at *La Pauvre Monsieur*
from John.

It was a copy of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey," and had been quite sufficient in a cheap leather binding to terminate the most violent quarrel they had ever had.

Now, she had gone, saying, "Bless you," and she had not looked back at all.

Amber then had changed and for one sudden moment in his heart, leaped the thought that he would run after her, insist upon her return and try in some way to make amends. But even so soon as this, the lesson he had learnt forced itself into practice. He knew that would be nothing but folly. That, he knew now, would be playing with Life.

Then he had changed as well; for at other times the thought would have needed no more than to stir in his mind and, before it had reached his heart, he would have acted on it.

He had changed—then had Jill changed, too?

Of a sudden it came to him that the whole of his world had altered. He had left the City of his birthright. He had closed the gates and set forth. His dwelling place no longer was in the City of Beautiful Nonsense.

It remained to be seen whether he would ever forget that birthright of his riches of which there was testimony in the records of his parish church. It remained to be seen whether he had locked the City gates, no less than whether, as he went upon his journeys he would tire at last of its burden and fling away the key.

For now he had become a traveler through coun-

tries where, at every turn of the road, the vista spread before him in all the variety of change. Amber had shown him this. He had become a traveler, that was the truth of it—a vagabond in the world of Wonderful Reality.

Chapter VIII: *The Answer to a Prayer*

IT had been understood before they left Venice, that Jill was to make a clean breast of it and, meeting John on the morning after his return, was to report the result to him in Kensington Gardens.

There are places in Kensington Gardens where the most secret of meetings can take place with comparative safety. No woman knows where they are, but she can always take you there by chance. When Jill told him they would be quite safe in the Gardens, she did not mean that she knew of such places. It was merely a woman's implicit faith in that God of Fortune who watches over all such matters as these.

Their meeting, doubtless, was a simple affair. It is an easy matter to deceive your parents when the greater part of their every day is already spent in deceiving themselves. It was the resolution to make a clean breast of it which, when once she had it face to face, was fraught with all the terrors and sensations of an earthquake in Prince of Wales's Terrace.

The heart of her courage had been high that night on the Lagoon, when John had touch of her hand. As well as that, Venice is some distance from Kensington High Street and though you can

be transported there in the space of thirty-six hours, it is a city of dreams you are exchanging for a crowded world of facts. She thought of the Lagoon, with the light on its opal water and she looked out into the muddy streets of London. She listened for the long-drawn cry of the Gondolier's "Oho," and heard the motor horns and strident cab whistles. She felt John's kisses hot on her lips and had found her mother leaning a cold nose against her cheek to greet her upon her return.

Besides all of which it was always so much easier for Jill to tell lies to her people. Doubtless, they asked and fervently for the truth, but it was only a lie they would properly have understood. And somehow one always finds it easier to talk to people about things they understand. Understanding is a sweet gift and in Prince of Wales's Terrace was as rare and brittle as the rarest of old china. What there was of it was locked in a cupboard of her mother's heart and if it were ever taken out for service was sure to be broken at the first touch. It might, indeed, be supposed that as the years passed by, in their struggle for appearances, Mrs. Dealtry had long ago put away the key. There were moments when Jill caught glimpses of that rare gift behind the beveled-glass of conventionality, but the cupboard door was never opened. Her fingers had never touched the treasures it contained.

So that resolution, which had been easy enough to make in Venice, took upon itself the suggestion of breaking open cupboard doors and smashing priceless china when once she had come home. In

Venice it had seemed the only thing to be done, to make a clean breast of it; to declare that this overwhelming consciousness of love which had come to her with the dying words of Thomas Grey was greater than duty or, if in the light of duty they alone could see things in Prince of Wales's Terrace, then, the greatest duty of all.

"Make your lives out of love as I have made mine—make your children out of love, as I have made mine—make your work out of love, as I have made mine."

It sounded no less wonderful in Kensington than it had done in Venice. Indeed, it was rather that it sounded more wonderful, so much more wonderful in that gray atmosphere of duty, as to be almost untrue.

No one sets a jewel on a dust-heap and, when by chance you find one lying in the cinders, it has all the appearance of being unreal. A piece of common glass reflecting the sun might easily glitter as bright.

Jill knew in terms of duty that it was the greatest duty of all; but in the long contemplation of that marriage of convenience which had awaited her, this communion of love seemed too much of idealism in a world of ordinary possibities. Life did not arrange itself like that in Prince of Wales's Terrace. Appearances flanked you on either side. It was what things looked like, not what they were. Everywhere it was the glitter of the common glass; for the sun, shining as it does upon the just and the unjust, in its full glory upon the Venetian canals

and in oblique and narrow shafts for one hour of the day into the houses of Prince of Wales's Terrace, a piece of common glass is as good any time as the rarest jewel on the dust-heap which most of us make of our lives.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Dealtry's conception of duty was anything like this, which in a sudden vision had come to Jill. There was her brother to be sent to Eton, not so much because you learnt more at Eton than at a common Grammar school, but because it caught a glitter from the sun on the educational dust-heap, dazzling the eyes of all and sundry who passed by.

In addition, there were a thousand and one little things in the home which a marriage with her father's friend would make the easier. Jill knew well enough the consternation which the announcement of her penniless marriage would make. They did not even know John; had never met him. They had not heard the terrible secret of that neighborhood in which he lived and to which he proposed to take her.

All they knew was that, without introduction—other than that of St. Joseph who may be canonized in Rome, but is a social nonentity in Kensington—she had made his acquaintance at Benediction in Sardinia Street chapel, that later, they two had met in Kensington Gardens, in possession of which knowledge, they had firmly forbidden her to see him again.

All that had occurred since then was no easy confession to make. Her duty, however, it was to

make it. She fully recognized that. Through no direct persuasion of John's had it been, but in a sudden glimpse of her own vision that she had realized the higher sense of duty in the words of Thomas Grey's benediction. She must explain it all to these two people who, by some strange chance which she could not understand, happened to be her parents. But how it was to be accomplished, how even begun, was more than she could imagine. Sitting on the edge of her bed that first night after her return from Venice, she stared at the pattern of the carpet until its wreaths and its lines and its circles all became symbolic of the confusion of her thoughts.

Two days were left her before John returned, a night as well before that hour of eleven when they were to meet in the Gardens. It was time enough. One sentence could begin it all and, once begun, questions would be so swift that in half an hour at most, they would know the full substance of the truth.

"I am not going to marry Mr. Skipwith."

She could begin it with such an unadorned statement as that. There was no mistaking what it meant. It was to the point and would save a host of questions which a less definite beginning would be sure to aggravate. She tried it aloud to herself:

"I'm not going to marry Mr. Skipwith," and said it emphatically as though both her mother and father were there in the room to hear it, immediately after which came that hot rush of blood with

the fear that someone might have been listening. She crept to the door and looked out. There was no one to be seen.

It had grown no easier next morning at daybreak at which hour she was awake and lay turning it over in her mind. All the troubles and problems of her life were associated with that crack in the plaster of the ceiling which had drawn itself out into the grotesque line of an old man's face. He looked that morning as though he were laughing behind his beard; as though he knew far better than she did what would be the end of it all. She hated men with beards. He reminded her that morning of a friend of her father's on the Stock Exchange. There, in that caricature on the ceiling, he seemed to be saying just the very things her father's friend would say about the prospects of such a match.

And after all, perhaps that opening sentence was a little startling. She ought to break it more gently than that. In one blow it was crushing all their hopes and destroying Ronald's chance of Eton.

St. Joseph might help her—poor St. Joseph. She went to the Carmelite church after breakfast and for an hour, with her face buried in her hands, she prayed before his altar.

Prayer is an odd thing. There is something of necromancy in it. You can pray standing up in the street; you can pray sitting down in a 'bus. The church prefers you to kneel, and whenever possible, before an altar. But until you realize that it would be acceptable to offer up a prayer on a merry-go-round, it is a waste of time to kneel at altar steps.

Jill prayed all the way along Kensington High Street and up Church Street to the very door. By the time she found herself kneeling at the foot of St. Joseph's altar, she realized there was nothing more to be said. She had finished her prayers. They were lifting up above the house-tops with the clatter of 'buses, carts and hooting motors, coming to the ears of God with the throb of life in them, having none of that sanctity of appearance with which the Church takes half the human nature out of a prayer. She had said them all. Nothing remained but to wait for their answering.

Half the people you see with faces buried in their hands in church have said their prayers when they were in their bath, or while eating their bacon at breakfast. They are kneeling there in the silent church waiting for an answer.

The only answer St. Joseph gave to Jill that morning in the Carmelite Church was this: "Go back home and say the first thing that comes on to the tip of your tongue. It has got to be said. Say what comes."

This may sound colloquial for any canonized saint of the Holy Church. Nevertheless, it is the sort of friendly way a saint will answer your prayer if it so happens you are splashing about in your bath or are not oppressed by the appearance of sanctity when you offer it. It may be well, indeed, to say one's prayers in the Latin tongue or in the beautiful if pedantic English of the Jacobean age, but you must expect the answer to be pitched in similar fashion when you receive it.

And this answer of St. Joseph's, if you follow it closely, was really only what Jill was saying to herself. But then that is the answer to a prayer. You want a certain thing—very well, you pray for it. You want a certain reply—very well, you answer it. The strange thing that has happened which you do not realize is this: By the submission of your desire in that attitude of mind, you have found courage.

Prayer is a breath—a breath before you leap. If you do not find courage, you find no answer to your prayer and for the simple reason that you have neither the pluck nor the faith to answer it for yourself.

On that morning, Jill had found courage. In the evening after dinner, when they were sipping their coffee and Ronald had been persuaded without conviction that bed was the only place for a boy of his age, she said suddenly:

"Mother, I'm not going to marry Mr. Skipwith."

Now St. Joseph had never put those words into her head. They had been there all the time. All she had found at the foot of his altar had been the courage to say them.

Chapter IX: *A Clean Breast of It*

MRS. ROWSE had an expression alluding to a feather and commenting in various ways upon its power of knocking her down.

"If she'd taken a feather," she once said to John, recounting to him an intimate little story of a neighbor in Peabody Buildings. "If she'd taken a feather and knocked me over the 'ead with it, she couldn't 'ave done me more damage than if she'd 'it me with a pair o' tongs."

You need nothing more graphic to describe a state of surprise than that and it requires an expression with something of this nature about it to give an idea of the effect of Jill's statement upon her father and mother that evening.

In the act of raising his cup of coffee to his lips, Mr. Dealtry stopped. Every action of his muscles, facial and otherwise, were arrested, until remembering, even in so extreme a moment as this, that his drink was getting cold, he emptied the cup, but never moving his eyes from his daughter's face till the dregs of the coffee were in his mouth. Then he put down his cup with a grimace.

To a woman, however, in a crisis bodily comforts mean little or nothing at all. Even personal

appearances may go to the wall. Mrs. Dealtry pushed cup and saucer away from her and stared for moments that seemed to Jill eternal, at this unnatural daughter of hers.

"You're not going to marry Mr. Skipwith?" she repeated.

"No," said Jill.

"Then who are you going to marry, please?" she inquired.

And that was as much like a woman as a brass farthing is like a piece of brass. For this was an assumption which no man would have arrived at and certainly not in that space of time. There was no logical or inevitable sequence about it. Pure reason could not alone have brought you to such a conclusion. The practical deduction was that marriage and more particularly marriage with Mr. Skipwith did not appeal to her. Indeed, to Mr. Dealtry this was nothing less than a putting of foolish ideas into his daughter's head.

"Why do you suggest it's conceivable she should want to marry anybody else?" he ejaculated. "There's not another girl she knows has the chance of a match like this."

He flung himself to his feet and stamped to the fireplace. It was inconceivable. As a statement of fact, he refused to accept it. No one, in or out of their senses, refused participation—what is more the participation of a wife—in an income of six or seven thousand a year. For the participation of a wife, as he understood it, was not a somnolent partnership and, as has been suggested before, in

this case not only Jill herself, but the whole family would profit by the alliance.

After all, one had to live. He remarked this fact as though it might have escaped their notice. He elaborated upon it. One had to live, he said, as became one's social status. If Prince of Wales's Terrace was, so to speak, the *mise-en-scène,* or if they liked it better—which inferred that he was by no means spluttering for a choice of words—if Prince of Wales's Terrace was the social atmosphere natural for them to breathe, it was their duty to the common laws of existence to keep themselves in that atmosphere at all costs.

"The survival of the fittest," he exclaimed and, with a gesture, took a hand out of his pocket, holding it before him as though he had the commodity there in his fingers.

"I said we must keep ourselves there at all costs," he went on, believing in the absence of opposition that not only was he being listened to, but that his words were carrying a weight which, if his wife only allowed him to go on long enough, would bear down every obstacle in Jill's mind.

"But when," he proclaimed, "when the means to be employed are as straightforward, as honest and legitimate as these, it's not merely flying in the face of Providence, it's flouting—flouting the laws, the laws that have made us what we are; the laws that have made England the greatest and the richest nation in the world. It isn't so much the money I'm thinking about. Six or seven thousand a year, of course, is not an income to be ignored; but I'm

not thinking about the money. We owe a duty to ourselves, we owe a duty to society. It's incumbent on everyone to keep up their standard. For even one individual to lower his standard"—he looked at the glass of liquor brandy standing untouched beside his empty coffee cup—"is insensibly to lower the standards of all about him."

He leant forward and picked up the glass, draining its contents at one draught. As the liquid ran warm down his throat, he was convinced that he was right. This was their standard. They must keep it up.

"If you'd studied sociological problems, Jill," he began again, but by this time, having closely studied the expression on her daughter's face, Mrs. Dealtry had no further need for the scientific side of the question. There was one thing she wanted to know before the matter could properly be dealt with and no answer but that to the question she had put already would satisfy her.

"If you're not going to marry Mr. Skipworth, Jill," she repeated, "then who are you going to marry?"

Mr. Dealtry dived his hands into his pockets and chucked back his head in despair. This was blunting the point of every single thing he had said. Women with all their impulses and their intuitions were fools at times. The girl was just shying at marriage with a man, not thirty but certainly nearly thirty years older than herself. All girls shied at marriage, unless its conditions were so wrapped up and concealed in the vapors of Romance that they had no means of seeing the semblance of the state

upon which they were entering. And it was up to parents who had any of the sense of duty owing to their children, to make them understand what that state was. It was fairly obvious to him that Romance had nothing to do with it. There was no Romance in marriage. His own wife would be the first to agree to that and so would every other sensible married couple he had ever met.

Love played a part. He was not so wanting in imagination as to deny that. He loved his wife. They had been together for twenty-three years and it would be conspicuously foolish of him if he did not. The habit of close companionship over a period of time like that was bound to promote affection. It would be something of a tragedy if it did not and in their social atmosphere and with their standards, tragedies were things to be avoided. Tragedies were emotional and of all things, God forbid, that any Englishman should be that!

What his feeling had been when first he had married had little or nothing to do with the argument. Every man felt the same. It was perhaps fortunate on the whole that the women they married did not. He had married when he was thirty-three and knew then by experience the ephemeral value of whatever it was he may have felt. To be perfectly candid, after all these years, he had well-nigh forgotten what it was. To hark back to and act upon past sensations might be amusing to a foreigner, but then he had always thanked God he was an Englishman.

They had got through with it anyhow and with-

out any great disturbance to her notions of life. She was young when they married and doubtless it had all been a little frightening to her. He supposed it was to most women. But they got over it quickly enough and settled down. The sense of Romance which most of them cherished in their youth in vague dreams and fond imaginings had perhaps been parted with in some reluctance. He was of the confident opinion, however, that his wife would not change her circumstances now, other than to improve them wherever possible.

It was preposterous then, this suggestion that Jill wanted to marry someone else, since it inferred she was being obedient to those romantic notions which he knew young girls did entertain but which were not paying guests in any sense of the word.

"I can't imagine why you want to suggest——" he began hotly.

"Let her answer," said Mrs. Dealtry, who had never taken her eyes from Jill's face. "If she doesn't want to marry anyone else, she can say so. Who do you want to marry, Jill?" she asked for the third time.

"John Grey," Jill replied, and felt as though John, rather than she, had said it.

Somehow or other it had not been her own courage. As the sound of the words permeated through the silence that was all about her, she marveled more and more that they had ever been spoken. Still, there it was. She had said it. Yet what was most strange in her mind was the sensation that this was not the end, but the beginning.

Praying to St. Joseph at his altar, she believed she had only to fulfill her promise and make a clean breast of it and once that was done—except for inevitable wranglings and arguments—the whole business was as good as accomplished.

She had not said she merely wanted to marry John Grey. She had meant she was going to marry him. But having said it, instead of its seeming now to be more likely of accomplishment, she felt further away than when it had all been secret.

Along in that high-ceilinged dining room of the house in Prince of Wales's Terrace, with the light of the red-shaded electrolier falling sharply on the empty coffee cups, with her mother sitting there in silence in the leather-covered, club armchair and her father taking deep breaths as he moved from one foot to another on the hearth-rug, she felt as though she had made confession of some almost nameless sin in their presence—a sin which proclaimed her unfit to be one of them in that place which seemed to have a prior claim over everything because it was her home.

She thought of Ronald upstairs in his room as he undressed, the text on the wall over his bed and the linoleum on the floor because, at his age, it was considered unnatural to have cold feet, and she felt as though even he would look at her with different eyes in the morning.

Mr. Dealtry was the first to speak. In the shadows where he stood, Jill heard him take one breath deeper than the rest.

"Going to marry that pauper scribbler!" he ex-

claimed, and the effort to pronounce these last two words with effect, gathered little bubbles at the corners of his mouth.

Mrs. Dealtry broke into laughter—a peal of it.

In that phrase—a peal of laughter—there must, of course, be some allusion to a peal of bells. One has heard laughter like that. It calls the heart to some sort of worship. But so far as there was anything in the nature of that simile in Jill's mind as she heard her mother's voice, it would have been a peal of bells from a thousand churches all at once, none in harmony, all mutilating the joy of sound.

For the next few moments, she sat in silence listening to what they had to say. They were talking in chipped and broken, swift and tumbling sentences. Money, position, comfort, these were the words that weighed heaviest and were all jumbled together in the burden of their talk. She heard each word. Not a sentence escaped her. In the end, it seemed they must bear her down with the pressure of their arguments and feverishly in the back of her mind, like a squirrel revolving and revolving in a cage, she clung to a thought to breast against the flood of their reason.

Chapter X: *Having a Dream*

SOMETHING that John had said to Jill as the gondola had borne them that night across the pearl black water of the Lagoon, became the squirrel revolving in its cage at the back of her mind as she listened.

A few moments before, she had been telling him what Thomas Grey's words had meant to her. Then, when for some long while she had been lying, all silent in his arms, he had said:

"I should never have spoken of this before, because, as I saw things, you had your idea of duty and I did not see it to be mine to alter that idea to serve my ends. I don't mind what I say now."

With no more than the taking of her breath, she had asked him what it was he was going to say.

"Well, there's something inside everybody," he began, "that makes life worth living. It's not in having things, or being things or doing things. I mean it's not a sense of possession, or pride, or power. It's a feeling like I get when I'm working and pick up a clean sheet of paper; a feeling that makes me hesitate before I touch the pen on it, because I know that when it is covered with words, they won't have expressed one iota of all the things that are in my heart, but only things that have struggled up like bubbles into my brain. I feel

sometimes I'd like to keep a sheet of paper always clean—a sheet of paper I've often put on my lap and pulled out my pen to write on, but have never defaced with a single word."

He had stopped suddenly, watching her hand as she turned and turned a locket chain about her fingers and neither did he see what she did, nor did she know what she was doing. As suddenly, he had continued.

"There's something like that inside everybody," he went on, "that clean sheet of paper—and it's worth all the sensations of life put together. Of course I'm trying to explain it my own way, using my own similes—like we all do, catching hold of words from the things we are doing every day. Some people call it keeping the heart of a child, but there's more than just that in it to me. Keeping the heart of a child is keeping a definite thing, the beauty of which you know. But you never quite know the beauty of the all that's never written on that sheet of paper. It's not the beauty of the best of you, for it's just a little bit better even than that. More or less you can imagine what your best would be. You can never quite imagine this. All this may mean nothing to you. I can only grope with words. To get the right word is like catching a star out of the sky."

On an impulse, he had seized hold of her hand; her hand twirling the locket chain.

"Do you know at all what I mean?" he had exclaimed, and gently, but none too certain, she had nodded her head.

"Well, anyhow," he went on, "this is what I should never have said before because of what you had described to be your sense of duty. I can say it now. Everybody has that one clean sheet of paper, and half of them—more than half!—deface its possibilities with the certainty of words. Oh! the sheet of paper's no good! I know you don't understand. How could you! You don't write anything. It can't mean to you what I really want it to mean."

There was almost a petulant note in his voice which had made her smile and feel so much older than he as she watched him.

"Oh, it's just leaving something inside you, clean, that the world can never touch! That's all. Having a dream in all this sleeplessness of materialism. Keeping something inside yourself which no one can ever take away—something which, in the great hour of love, or in the great moment of sacrifice becomes the greater for giving with both hands. Words weren't made for it. Thoughts come near to it some days, often in sunshine, when you lie on your back in long summer grass and stare into the sky that is fathoms deep and blue; when, as you lie there, a breath of wind—and it really seems the breath of someone breathing—whispers the leaves in some poplar trees; when a bee hums by like a man singing bass in an anthem and a lark gets up out of the meadows, mounting a ladder of light with a song on every rung, then a thought gets somewhere near it."

He paused. It must almost have been for breath, he had been speaking so fast and she never thought for one moment how sublimely young he was. To her, he was a man, speaking all the wisdom of the ages.

"It's not been a thought," he went on quickly to explain. "It's not been a thought you've thought with words; not a thought that has reached the communicating function of your brain. You get no idea from it; only a sensation that somewhere in the world there is an intense essence of beauty—a great ultimate purpose of which in that moment you are wholly conscious but of which, so far as words are concerned, you are as overwhelmingly ignorant. No, not even thoughts really touch it. It's a revelation—that's all. It's a dream in all this sleeplessness of facts."

Even then, he had not said what he had meant to say. She had waited with patience through his next silence letting all the words he had already poured into her ears saturate through and through her mind. Presently he said what he had intended; the message he had to give her in which words were competent.

"If you'd married that man," he said, "married him without love, for the advantage the marriage brought you and even unselfishly for the advantage it brought others, I think you'd have lost all touch with those moments in which one sees and feels the intense essence of beauty in the ultimate purpose. Your dream would have gone. All your life you

would have been awake with facts, staring at them, as one lies and stares into the darkness through a sleepless night."

She had known, not particularly that what he said, but what he meant, was right. Yet she asked him one question. It came out of her training, out of what her father called that social atmosphere of Prince of Wales's Terrace. She could not fly with him all at once.

"Do you think then," she had asked, "that the whole of life is a dream? That we've got to sleep through it all?"

He had sat for a while thinking, then suddenly had taken her arm, pointing to an orange light that glittered in a far window on the Island of Murano across the Lagoon.

"In that room," he replied, "someone's slipping off their clothes and going to bed."

As though to prove the vision of his words, the light had suddenly gone out. It was swallowed up in the blue darkness as if it had dropped like a match into the water and left no trace behind.

"They've gone to bed," he whispered. "All the tiring, physical facts, they've put away from them. They've thrown them aside from all contact with their body—just their clothes, flung onto the chair. When the sun rises to-morrow morning away there over the Adriatic, they'll wake again and begin another day. Steal that man's sleep, set him to work with his hands all night and his body will die of it. Well—minds die. Without sleep, without dreams, your soul dies. A materialist is a man

who never dreams, because he never sleeps. It is always day with him. You'd have been a materialist if you'd married like that. That fact would have kept you awake all your life through. It would have become the insomnia of your soul."

This was the squirrel revolving ceaselessly in the cage of her mind as they talked to her. Of a sudden then she opened the door of its cage and let the squirrel out.

Chapter XI: *The Bird in the Net*

"MARRIAGE is only a bargain to you then," said Jill quietly.

Mr. Dealtry observed with emphasis that all contracts of exchange were in the nature of a bargain. He quoted instances.

"If marriages were only made in heaven," he added, "the obtaining witnesses in case of litigation might prove awkward."

That amused him. It was far from his intention to treat the matter lightly, but while bringing home the importance of the civil aspect of matrimony, it was at the same time delicately humorous. It was not his custom to laugh at his own jests, but he laughed at this. It never was his custom to laugh at any joke he made, but there were always exceptions. When he found his humor was not appreciated, he assumed that solemnity of expression which he considered becoming in anyone who could lay claim to a witty remark.

Neither Mrs. Dealtry nor Jill were aware that he had made a joke at all, for this was not the kind of answer her question had needed. In the tone of her daughter's voice some distant memory had been stirred in Mrs. Dealtry's mind; not stirred so much as to revive an old consciousness, but just

sufficient to make her sense the whole world of meaning behind those words. She was conscious of this much, that her husband's remarks had been futile and no answer at all to what Jill had said.

That distant memory in Mrs. Dealtry's mind was doubly recalled by the fact that only that morning she had picked up a volume of Browning's poetry—a copy that had been given her when she was nineteen. It had not been opened for twenty years. She had opened it then and found passage after passage underlined in pencil.

At first sight of those silent proofs of youthful sentimentality, she had muttered a laugh to herself. She had forgotten how ridiculous she had been. Some couplets were scored, not with one line only, but often two or three, the pencil still showing its emotional indentation on the page:

> Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
> And the sun looked over the mountain's rim—
> And straight was a path of gold for him,
> And the need of a world of men for me.

Well, anybody would have marked that. It was something you quoted whenever Browning's name was mentioned to show that your education had not been neglected; that, though you lived in a prosaic world and did your shopping at Barker's in the High Street, you still had a soul for poetry.

But the last line had been scored the whole way underneath:

> And the need of a world of men for me.

Involuntarily her mind had struggled with its memories of what that had meant to her when she had made that mark of her pencil so deeply indented on the page. Could it be possible there had ever been the need of a world of men for her? In any case, what exactly did it mean? A world of men? She could read it scarcely more than literally now. A world of men! One was ample. She supposed it meant just sex, crying to sex—but surely she could not have marked it at that age because it had meant that to her then? Sex—it was a hateful word, a word to shudder at. What she had learnt of sex since she had been married, was something of which she had never made complete confession, even to herself. Whenever she did think of it, she turned the thought swiftly aside with the remembrance of her children.

But none of these considerations had solved the mystery of why she had scored that line with its deep pencil mark:

And the need of a world of men for me.

Had there been some consciousness of sex in her at that age? And whatever it was, had it conveyed a sense of beauty, strong enough in emotion to induce her in this manner to make a fool of herself? Her cheeks were hot now at the dim remembrance of it. For she did remember something—some affair which returned to her mind—an incident she would now describe as a foolish flirtation. If that were not the proper description of it, then she felt

shame to think what it might have been in her mind; thoughts she could only describe as—unholy—now. Had it been that? She tried to think she had forgotten. But irresistibly there came into her memory a night at a dance in the country somewhere. There was an old garden about the house with high box edges round the paths and the night was blue in its darkness—blue and silver, with the spread of glittering stars. And she had walked down those paths with—yes—she could remember his name. Heaven only knew what had become of him since.

Had she thought she was in love with him? She supposed she must. Or—and this was a terrible thought—had she only been in love with love. No! It could not have been so unholy as that. She must have thought she was in love with him, for as the memory returned with the hypnotic concentration of her gaze upon those pencil lines, she remembered vaguely the hot swift rush of burning words he had poured into her ears, the vows of eternal adoration he had made, the kisses he had squandered on her cheeks and neck, the trembling hand she had let find its way to hold her beating breast.

As that vision came back, she had shut the book, trembling herself and all afire with the shame of her memories. "The need of a world of men!" She thanked God that need had swiftly found its quiet in the duties of married life and the care of her children. They should have the best that she could give them and that evening, hearing her husband's fatuous remarks about the civil contract of marriage, she knew it was the best of her advice,

based on her experience of married life, which she could give to Jill.

It would not be expedient, however, to give that advice direct. Telling her she must give up this pauper marriage, urging her to see the disadvantages it would entail, this was not the policy to pursue. She must sympathize and with understanding, if it were only that understanding arising out of memories which had no meaning to her now.

She enjoined her husband not to be a fool.

"Jill doesn't mean anything like that," she said. "What's the matter with her is that she's romantic —like I was at her age. She doesn't realize yet that Romance only carries you to the doors of the church and then leaves you in the ditch."

John's words were burning in her mind, or Jill could never have said what she did.

"Isn't it that you leave Romance," she declared, "and prefer to get into the ditch yourself?"

She was fighting with the courage of her despair, for the odds were all against her. All the twenty years of obedience to their wishes were on their side and they had not made one demand of her yet. Would she obey when they did?

"Honor thy father and mother that the days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." But the very length of those days, were she to humor their wishes by marrying Mr. Skipwith, might be the essence of the ugliness of life. She might pray that her days might be short in the land and that most fervently she did, but so ingrained was this creed of her home life that she

feared for her courage when the test of their authority came.

In the few moments of his wife's silence, following the unexpected candor of Jill's retort, Mr. Dealtry, seizing an opportunity too rare to be missed, demanded what she and her pauper scribbler were going to live on. He spoke of bread and cheese and kisses without a smile. The humor of putting it that way was not his own.

"Is Ronald to give up his chances in life?" he asked her. "Am I to take to hard work again at my age? Is your mother to give up her comfortable home with a respectable address and go to a house in Earl's Court?"

To all of which, comprehensively to them, though to herself as though she were speaking in a dream, Jill replied: "I suppose so."

They both looked at her in amazement.

"So it's for this I've spent the best years of my life, to bring you up!" exclaimed Mr. Dealtry. "And while we are suffering all the discomforts of Earl's Court," he added, "may I ask where you're going to live?"

"In Fetter Lane," said she.

Then, in one voice together, they declared she was more than romantic. She was mad! And such is the power of training and environment, that Jill thought she must be mad as well. For though there were many things she wanted to say in her defense, in justification of all this wonder of love, yet there, in the Prince of Wales's Terrace, they did not even seem worth the while.

Indeed in that atmosphere, there were moments when tremblingly, she mistrusted herself; moments while she listened to the speciousness of their arguments when she thought it must have been some other than herself who had made those promises to John. Venice, the Lagoon, the death-bed of Thomas Grey, the tender wistfulness and belief of the little old white-haired lady, they began to appear to her in all the nature of a vision she could but dimly reach in the focus of her mind. Gradually, as they talked with their countless instances, she became awake again with facts. This—and she knew it—was the sleeplessness of Life; the insomnia her soul had been accustomed to. And every moment she was losing power to close her eyes and find the restfulness of that dreaming John had brought her.

Over and over again she repeated in her brain the last benediction of Thomas Grey, as one, with aching eyes in the darkness, counts sheep going through a gate. Passionately she yearned for that contented view of life, John had whispered to her as the gondola broke the water into ripples on the Lagoon.

It was out of love indeed that he would make his life, his children and his work. Why was it such a degradation to be poor? Not everyone who did their best was paid for it. And wasn't it loving the best and doing it that, through all the gray days and the blue days, made life worth living?

Some would always be well paid. Some would always make money. But did that make money a

thing in itself, more worth having than the joy of the work which brought it? For a man to love his work, for a woman to love her man, weren't these the essentials with which to set out on the journey? For them both to love each other, as John loved her and she, him—was not that the essence of the best that life could afford?

She thought these things, violently, passionately —but each thought was like the beating of a bird's wings as it struggled in a net. The power of flight was in each thought as it fluttered in her brain, but the net was there about her, imprisoning every effort of escape. She knew once uttered they would sound the note of madness in that room.

There about the walls were some hundreds of pounds worth of old furniture, bought in more palmy days. Was that to be sold when they went into the purgatory of Earl's Court? There was her father's glass of liquor brandy at eighteen shillings a bottle. Was that to be empty when he took his cup of coffee after dinner? There was the motor car he was intending to buy. It had not occurred to her to be strange that he had already selected the make and the horsepower, indeed had had a trial spin in it, when the purchase was ultimately to be made with someone else's money. A motor car was too ripping a possession to bother overmuch about who paid for it. There were all the things of comfort and luxury that had become the habit of their lives under the roof of that house in Prince of Wales's Terrace. Were they all to be given up for her want of determination to put a gold ring

on her finger and, as many another girl had done before her, make herself comfortable for life with a man for whom she had only an appreciable amount of respect?

Somehow, there in that room, it seemed madness to protest. It was her mother, watching her in all those moments, who saw that struggle between love and duty in which she swung.

"George," she said to her husband, "I was just thinking of the quickest way we could drop our friends, because, I don't think it's conceit to say, we do know some of the best people."

"A cheerful thought," said he.

"If we go to Earl's Court," she replied, "that'll be quite enough."

"But I'm damned if we're going to Earl's Court!" he retorted.

"I think we've got to consult Jill about that," said she. "She knows her own happiness best."

Chapter XII: *The Zoo*

JILL came to their meeting in Kensington Gardens two mornings later, dragging her steps as though it were to the scaffold of their parting.

They had triumphed in Prince of Wales's Terrace. It was not for a moment that she admitted it. It was scarcely even that she realized. All that had happened in her consciousness was the gradual dripping away of her courage until she knew her heart, which had been full and brimming over, was now as empty as a leaking pitcher.

Not one sign of admission of their victory had Jill given at the end of that encounter. In face of her father's authority, peremptorily commanding her to see no more of John, she had given no word of obedience.

Nothing had she done, of which she was conscious, to convey to either of them her knowledge of defeat before the odds which they had arrayed against her. Yet during the two days that followed, in her mother's voice, in the little propitiating things she did, the very way she came into her room and kissed her when once the light was out and no one could see the tears staining her cheeks, in all these subtle attentions, Jill felt the hand of the victor

stretched out to soften, to approve of her surrender.

How had she known? Had she found the tears wet on her cheeks and guessed from them? No—it could not be that. The knowledge had been there already or she would never have come to her room. Only with a certainty of Jill's submission would she have betrayed this spirit of magnanimity. Had she believed Jill's mind was made up to marry her pauper scribbler, there would have been an unmelting coldness in her eyes, a note like the vibration of a steel wire in her voice. Had she really believed her daughter was going to make such folly of her life, she would have fought for her sanity with every weapon that could bring her pain.

With this chilling knowledge of her mother, there oozed the last drop of her courage away. Something inevitable there appeared to be in the pointing finger of her fate. She had been meant to see love on the dim horizon of her vision—a figure in the far distance, high on the crest of the hills, a figure, silhouetted, she could just discern as she walked the broad highway through the valley below. She had been meant to see him, to hear even in that distance the faint music of his pipes. But that was all.

There, on the crest of those hills, the winding pathway was no more than a shepherd's track, leading to the wild places where those who follow must be content to find the earth a pillow often for their head. Her road, she knew it, was the open highway, pressing on with those to reach the lighted

townland, where there was down to rest one's tired limbs upon and the laughter of a feast to cheer up an empty heart.

So she came to Kensington Gardens that morning, as one, wearily dragging their steps out of the already toilsome way, knowing it is a fruitless discursion; counting each football in certainty of the labor of their return.

John, coming to meet his Jill, was in other mood than this. By careful calculation, with all the things that he could pawn, making no material difference to the domestic arrangements of the house, there was a sum amounting to nigh on twenty pounds to defray the cost of the wedding and the subsequent honeymoon.

His imagination took flights like the swallows when he began thinking of all they could do with twenty pounds. He skimmed the possibilities even of going abroad and as swiftly left touch of them when a sudden fear came to his mind of their finding themselves prisoners, unable to get back.

For now, in the new world he had entered, he realized his mind was full of fears; always because of Jill; such fears would have been ludicrous for himself. Added to which, the more he thought about her and the life to which she was accustomed, the more he pictured the house in Prince of Wales's Terrace as a kind of mansion, with men servants and maid servants, a comprehensive inventory of all it was intended your imagination should read into the tenth commandment.

Yet these fears had no firm hold on him for

long. He could shake them from him with a laugh in the belief that she loved as he loved. A sense of power pervaded everything and drove difficulties before it by the sheer magic of its will. The East African lion, if it had got out of its cage, had done no more than push its head through the gates of the circus ring. It was not long before the beast was safely back again behind the bars.

John was cracking his whip once more with all the old confidence of the ringmaster—the old piebald horse of happy circumstance was ambling round the circus track with the same obedience as of old. Will, and free-will at that, could order everything.

One thing only there was of all he had learnt in these first days of his new revelations, one thing hanging heavily about his heart which, however often he might put it away, returned with a clinging persistence. With the cracking of his whip, he might drive it helter-skelter out of the ring, but again and again with the pathetic insistence of the dog that plays the clown, it would come back to his feet.

He believed that Amber was suffering. Why, he had not vanity enough properly to understand. Yet still there were certain things that had happened which he could only read one way. No other interpretation seemed possible. For three months, so Madame Defautin had told him, she had dined alone at *Le Pauvre Monsieur*. Again that sound in her voice when she had questioned his use of Harefield in his make-believe.

"But Harefield belonged to us," she had said.

Had she cared what belonged to them then? Had he known till then that anything did belong to them in their relationship?

And lastly, her turning away at the door in Fetter Lane, her turning away and her never looking back.

He did not want to believe she was really suffering, but the knowledge would never leave him alone for long. Often he found himself wondering what would she be like when she suffered? How deep would that suffering be? Would she sit at home on that drawing-room floor in Hogarth Road with the tears tumbling down her cheeks? Never! Not she! It would be a dumb suffering like an animal's —a turning hither and thither, a running up this street, down that, like a dog that is lost—a being very busy over nothing, taking a vivid interest in things her hands touched but her mind was oblivious of and singing, perhaps—singing all the time.

Now that once he had sensed the truth, he could in his imagination picture all the twitchings of her pain. Yet what could he do? Had the fault been his? He was in a new world—a world where things hurt—a world of reality, needing all belief and all courage and faith to see the wonder it contained. He supposed her suffering was part of it, but as yet failed signally to reconcile it with his beliefs and the faith he had in his heart.

For what had made her suffer? He had had her assurance she had not cared before. Had that assurance been false? He caught for the moment suspicion of a woman's pride and as swiftly put

it away from him. What could she care for in him? He had given her nothing of himself as he was giving now with both hands to Jill. Indeed, had he ever realized how wonderful it was to give, until he had met her and she first had given him her interest as he read his story to her that day in Kensington Gardens?

But argue it as he might, the knowledge was irrevocably there. She was hurt. She was suffering. The consciousness of it came back again and again and at moments, most heavily, when his heart was lightest.

It came back to him that morning as he turned to the top of the Flower Walk from the Albert Memorial. For an instant it darkened all the glorious prospects of their meeting. With an effort he thrust it away from him.

"One must shut one's eyes going through the world!" he exclaimed and he shut his eyes, but like a blind man could still feel the presence of her pain in the tips of his fingers.

But the sight of Jill, coming up the walk to meet him, drove every other thought beside it out of his head. She was so wonderfully dressed. She looked far too beautiful for it to be believable that she loved him. He thought an instant of his hat and wished for her sake he had bought a new one. The next moment thoughts like that were gone like bubbles. Her hand was in his. Her eyes were searching his face and though they looked sad, he knew he could soon bring their laughter back.

To know how wonderful a place the world was,

it was only necessary to realize that they were soon to be married. He never doubted that, even with the sad look in her eyes. Her eyes were often sad. With all the riches of her fur coat and that house in Prince of Wales's Terrace, he frequently caught an expression in her eyes as though she were looking out into the world from a very little window, deep set within the wall.

"We can't stay here," said she—the first words that were spoken.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Why not?" he asked.

She gave him the only reason she had—the reason predominant above all others in her mind: "Because," said she, "we can't."

"Where can we go then?" he questioned her.

She had hoped he would tell her that. With their freedom in the world, men knew of all sorts of odd places.

He suggested Fetter Lane. She shook her head. With what she had to tell him, she feared to trust herself there alone with him as once before when he told her the story of Beautiful Nonsense. For the last two days in Prince of Wales's Terrace, it had been as though they had beaten gongs in her ears. She was deaf to everything inside herself but the sound of that metallic clanging of facts. By now, she was afraid of the stillness should it follow, and follow it surely would in those rooms in Fetter Lane.

"I want somewhere where we can talk," said she, "but where there are lots and crowds of people."

"The Zoo," suggested John to please her fancy; for what did it matter where they went when, not long time to come, the days together would be their very own.

"The Zoo—to-day's Bank Holiday—there'll be crowds there all right. Awful fun, the Zoo, on a Bank Holiday."

She pressed his arm tenderly when he talked of fun, for she knew how much she was going to hurt him. And it really was wonderful of him to think of the Zoo. That was the very kind of place she wanted—a place where there were so many people you could not know quite all the pain that was in your heart; where, even if your lips quivered, someone might see it, so that every outward and visible sign of your suffering would have to be concealed.

He could not plead with her there; not as he might if they were alone where none could see. He could not touch her hand. He could not walk up and down or beat his hands together, or do any of those things she could quite believe a man might do who must listen to the confession of a woman's want of courage such as hers.

There they might sit together perhaps, but anything they might say would be certain to be overheard, so that a sense of dignity must keep them circumspect and she would never have the fullest knowledge of how much she had hurt him. Poor consolation for one who ached to think she must hurt him at all. Even so, she had hope that the pain of it need not wholly be administered by her. It was not that she wished definitely to tell him

they could not be married, as that when she had said all, had told him of the duties oppressing her on every side, that then he, of his own accord, would say how impossible their marriage had become.

"That'll be splendid," she said with enthusiasm, and forced a tender smile that deceived him. Then they walked down into Knightsbridge and John called a hansom.

"The Zoo!" said he, and from the tone of his voice it might have been the Bank of England.

Chapter XIII: *The Window that is Closed*

INDEED, it was crowded enough. An all-pervading odor of orange peel met them the moment they entered the gates. One forgets that children are being born every hour of the day and all the year round, until one passes through the toll-gates of the Zoological Gardens on a Bank Holiday. One forgets that paper bags can be manufactured at the rate of a hundred a minute, or that the supply of oranges, lemonade and gingerbread are trades which make for some men their fortunes while all the time they are making many children sick.

These facts you learn quickly in the Zoo on a Bank Holiday. They are facts indeed from which you cannot get away; not even if you go into the Cat House which is calculated to disagree with a glass of milk and soda and a bun.

Wherever they went that morning, the crowds were unavoidable. John thought of the Cat House, prompted by reasons unnecessary to repeat, but with no success. These children had seen cats all their lives, had pulled their tails and tweaked their whiskers. But they had never before seen them behind the bars of a cage and that made all the difference.

The Cat House was crowded. Putting his nose

round the corner of the door, John was glad, rather than sorry for that. As for the Monkey House, the monkeys were reveling in the freedom of their prisons, while the public was perspiring in one dense and uncomfortable mass around the bars.

"It's all a matter of which way you look at things," said John. And that was the first time that morning Jill had laughed.

They tried the Lion House. Any fool might have known it would be no better. It was then an hour before feeding time and men and women as well as children, with solemn faces were standing there, who had been waiting for hours, nibbling little buns while they waited to see one animal dispose in five minutes of twenty pounds of good, red horseflesh—bones and all.

It was only by that vast open aviary where the British birds fly in and out of the branches all day long, that they found any room to move.

"British birds," said John, "are not interesting to British people. How can they be? They keep them in little cages themselves."

The voice of a fat woman in purple, with three children apparently all the same age, had decided him.

Seeing the notice, "To the British Birds," she had said:

"Blowed if I paid my sixpence to see a lot of sparrers!"

"Come on!" said John, and they had at least found room to stand and press their noses up against the meshes of the wire.

Here he pointed out to her the birds he knew as they flew by. And it seemed he knew them all. But not only did he know them all; he had his stories about them, like the stories you tell children. Such stories he had already told her of the parrot in Fetter Lane; of the statue of St. Joseph they painted with a gray beard in Ardmore to make a patron Saint of him.

She listened gently at first, then willingly. In time it became eagerly, little realizing, as little he realized too, of the subtle influence these stories were having in her mind. Without knowing it, either of them, he was putting her to sleep. Gradually there was creeping back into the breast of her, the heart of a child. In some odd fashion of his own, he could touch the essence of beauty as he talked. He carried the Romance of Life about with him, like a master key in his pocket.

She had come there with ideas of money, comfort, position, all filling her thoughts; echoes that were never still, but continually beating from one side to the other of her brain. Those echoes had been keeping her awake and now, gradually and imperceptibly, they were fading into silence. With the sound of his stories, more than the actual story they told, he was stealing her soul out of city streets. Step by step it crept out of the lighted townland in the valley. Step by step it mounted the hills to the crest where Love was. Then it was only a shepherd's track where they walked, but it led through the scented gorse and the tinkling heather, where there was no such thing as a next-

door neighbor, or the chance of meeting a friend whom circumstance had compelled you to drop.

Money did not seem to matter so much there. Indeed the blossoms of the gorse were all the gold they needed; the ripples of the hill streams, silver enough to fill their purse.

John could give you the impression that you could live like a squirrel upon nuts and disperse with all the oranges, the lemonade and ginger-bread, indeed, with all the feasts of plenty in the world.

As he talked, she could almost believe such things were possible; yet there, had she known it, there was he scraping his few possessions together and exchanging them for money over the pawnbroker's counter, in order to defray the expenses of a honeymoon.

"See that little bird!" he had exclaimed one moment and beyond the straight, eager line of his finger, she had made out a tiny thing with a black head and soft gray breast, hopping from one branch to another.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A blackcap."

"And what's he do?"

According to him they all did strange, odd things; things that human beings might do, if only they had such freedom, or such a joy in life. And there already was her eagerness to know.

"What's he do?" she had asked.

The blackcap, he told her, was a ballad-monger in the streets of the world where birds lived—a ballad-monger who, every early springtime hired a

top attic in a quick-set hedge wherein to practice his latest song, until he knew it off by heart.

"Why a top attic?" she asked.

"Well, because it's an absolutely original song, and he has to be very careful that no one sneaks the idea. There are lots of birds that go about stealing ideas for songs just at that time of the year when there's nothing but music in the air, so he has to be careful. He has to take a top attic—anything on the ground floor would be fatal. Why, the passer-by in the street would hear him at it."

Here was his Nonsense which, like the shoes on his feet or the satchel on his back, he must bring with him to make a sense of Wonder in his new world of Reality.

There are John Greys in every street. You have only to look at their unfashionable shoes, or the shapeless leather satchel on their backs to recognize them. And to the men whose brains are tired of being wise, they are fools. And to the fools whose hearts beat a sound pulse beneath their waistcoats, they are the best company on the road.

"It's just in the end of April," he went on, when once he knew her heart was intrigued with the folly of his tale, "as soon as there come those soft, warm winds when you can feel everything in the lanes and woods is leaning out to catch the first sight of Summer, it's just then he goes out in the streets, up and down, singing the song he's invented. And no one has got quite the little trills and turns that he has; moreover it's too late for them to try and steal them from him then. You see the

end of April's copyright day. The song a bird sings from the first of May is his very own. It's too late to be a plagiarist then."

"But why's it too late? I should have thought it became common property once he sings it in the streets. What's to prevent anyone picking it up?"

"The mere expediency of time," said John, and turning his nose in the hole of the wire-netting through which it was still pushed, he looked straightly in her eyes. "The expediency of time—the call of Youth. Once the Spring has set well in, there's no time even in Youth to learn another fellow's song. You've got to sing your own. All the windows in the streets are open. *Summer's cumen in.* The ladies are up there in the second and third-floor branches, throwing down pennies to him as he sings. You can't pick up another fellow's penny. That's not tip and run."

"Why do you say—tip and run?"

"Because that's the game they play—like we play cricket."

"But does he sing for pennies?"

"No. I wondered if you'd ask that. No. It isn't for pennies he sings; though most times it's nothing but pennies he gets."

"What does he sing for then?"

Behind all this nonsense of his, she felt all the functioning of his thought, the constant steady drift of his mind, the message he was giving her with perhaps never a thought of such a thing as a message in his heart. A long pause she had made before she asked that question, because she was even

then, half afraid to hear the answer she knew he would give. As it was, the words had come to her lips before her mind was quite ready to have them said.

"He sings," said John presently, "he sings just for the joy of singing, and until he finds someone who can share the joy that it is. There are no pennies in this transaction. There are some who think it's a matter of chance. But I don't. I don't think it's chance if the song's all right."

"Why, what happens?"

"Well, up and down the street he goes one day and the next, and the days after. And there are plenty of heads looking out of the windows, but it's a voice he wants to hear. And he always hears it in the end, or at least he thinks he does."

"What voice?"

"A voice singing little snatches of his song. A heart that has picked up a stave of his music and, perhaps all unconsciously, is singing it to itself. He's standing at a corner of a street where the quick-set villas turn into a row of mansions of lilac; his head's well thrown back and he's singing for all he's worth and then, suddenly he hears a voice catching up one of the tuney bits and singing it with him and he stops. And there, upstairs in one of those houses, with those cobweb lace curtains they have over some of the windows in the lilac mansions, he locates the voice, because, though he has stopped, it still goes on—not quite so sure of itself —but it goes on. And then he knows."

"Knows what?"

"That he's found his mate."

"But how can he be sure?"

"Because love's too timid to throw windows open for it, or fling pennies into the street. Heaps of people think they can love like that, with everyone hearing the clink and the rattle of the pennies as they clatter on to the pavements. But love has the smallest voice in the world. It's only passion that cries out loud. Love has the smallest voice and only a very few can hear it. But when they do, they can hear it from the other end of the world."

She leant against the mesh of the wire netting, listening, at last in silence, to the ending of his tale.

The blackcap had long since vanished into the forest of branches; but she had forgotten the blackcap by then. They might have been anywhere for all that she realized of her immediate surroundings. All she could see was the opening of those windows on Prince of Wales's Terrace and the shower of pennies on the pavement that day when she would be married to Mr. Skipwith.

But all she could hear was the sound of the smallest voice which, with its penetrating stillness, lifted above the clamorous cries of the expediency and came to her, unbroken, across the whole turmoil of the metallic sounds of life.

Chapter XIV: *Assessing the Income of an Author*

HERE is the spirit of youth in love, a thing as impossible to capture with words as would be the hope to arrest its sweetest note in the throat of a bird.

After that story of the Springtime ballad-monger, Jill gave herself up to a world of dreams and wandered with him as though in the wildest solitude through all those holiday-making crowds in the Zoological Gardens. No one seeing them there in the midst of that jostling turmoil of children, upon that carpet of paper bags and in that odor of oranges, could have believed how much alone they were.

For this is what it amounts to, and in the end is all a matter of philosophy, that you make your world with whatever materials there may happen to your hand; while most of us, like bad workmen, complain of our tools. But nearly any tool is good enough, as the old workmen would have told you, who did some of the most beautiful carving and executed some of the most wonderful masonry before ever there was a machine to make a chisel, or a lathe to turn an instrument to their liking.

The Zoological Gardens on a Bank Holiday are poor material for a pair of lovers with which to make their solitude. But a cunning craftsman, one in the tips of whose fingers is the love of his work, he can do it. Before that tale of his was finished, John had converted that pandemonium of London holiday-makers into the stillness you find in a country lane, where the long trailers of the brambles, lifting and curling up above the hedge-tops, are the only things with the impulse of motion to the winds that blow across on their way to the fields beyond.

It was in the essence of John Grey to make his world for himself and just as he went along. It was in the essence of those who dwelt in Prince of Wales's Terrace to submit to its being a persistent revelation through the facts of life with which they were brought in contact. Poverty, for example, if it came their way, made a poor thing of the whole world. Wealth enriched it by just so much as riches could buy.

With this philosophy, possessions, pride and power, all are essentials to a reasonable world. Deprived of these, life has every aspect of being a dismal failure. Yet life, as a matter of fact, is exactly the same. There is an intrinsic quality in it as also in all its elements which, when once you have discovered it, can be made out of any circumstance whatsover.

The gold which the grave-digger claims as a perquisite out of the mouth of the corpse may be made into a pin with which you bind the scarf about your baby's neck. It is no less a joy to the grave-

digger who sells that gold to buy a few pots of beer, than it is to you who, in happy ignorance of the last state in which it existed, buy it to adorn your baby's clothing. In one case it may be sentiment and a joy to the sentimentalist; in the other there is something of gross materialism about it and a joy to the realist.

Yet it is the same gold. Nothing has happened, except the form of its presentation, to change that first intrinsic quality of kingship amongst metals it possessed when it lay in the earth of the miner's claim. Only its appearance has altered and if appearances are your standard in the world, then, by the time it reaches your baby's neck, you have long since lost all appreciation of the thing it really is.

John Grey found that the intrinsic quality of life was beauty, wherefore he kept his recognition of it in anything and everything that came to his hand.

In pursuit of this inherent purpose, he certainly was presented with many difficulties, of which this marriage with all its responsibilities was by no means the least. But he had belief, which, in an uncertain world, is better than any knowledge. He did not know how to provide against those moments when there would be no coal in the box outside the door, or the cupboard would be empty of supplies, but implicitly he believed that he would. With no little amount of courage, he told Jill of these possible contingencies, at the same time assuring her she need have no fear.

"It doesn't happen often," said he, and for-

tunately did not see the instant's expression of the old fear in her eyes.

"But when you're looking after things," he went on with enthusiasm, "of course it won't happen at all. I buy things sometimes I don't want and that runs away with money in a rotten way. You see money comes in lumps—that's the worst of it. And when you get ten pounds one day, you go about feeling that you're making ten pounds a week and live at the rate of five hundred a year till the next morning. It's all wrong, I know. But you won't let me do that. I know you won't. Of course, I can get odd little bits for poems—a guinea a time—almost whenever I like. But poems don't pay and yet I'd sooner write poems than anything else. Stories have to be invented, but a poem's just there; all you have to do is pick it up, like a colored pebble that catches your eye on the sea-shore. You just pick it up and start polishing it and sometimes it comes out like an onyx and sometimes it's only just a Scotch pebble and sometimes it's nothing but a dull bit of clay that won't take a polish at all. I've written one since I came back. Shall I read it to you?"

His eyes were lighted up like a child's expectant of a reward for good conduct. It would have needed the hardest of hearts to refuse him the interest he asked.

"Go on—read it," she said, smiling, and in a second he had it whipped out of his pocket and was reading it to her there in the midst of those Bank Holiday crowds in the Zoological Gardens.

London, like the fierce sun in summer heavens
  Burns itself out with life and endless passings to and fro,
But you and I will find earth's quiet places—
  Make Life a woodland freshet where the mosses grow.

Let them beat up and down their weary pavements!
  They needs must drink the wine who tread the unrelenting press.
We shall lie down and plunge our wind-scorched faces
  In that white water singing through our wilderness.

Give them the music of their clanging cymbals
  Who best can make of Life a pageant passing by;
We'll have the blackbird's flute in sudden, eager phrases
  The lark's diapason in the cathedreled sky.

Is Life the finer, hammered on an anvil?
  Flung in the furnace? Hastened to shape within the mold?
Let's take it, you and I, in lingering fingers
  And turn it to beauty out of the virgin gold.

Nor ever let us grieve if it remain unfinished,
A thing despised of commerce in the noiseful market place
It is not all to sell—more joy's in making.

"I haven't finished the last verse," said he. "It's rough there. I want a new polishing rag."

"Are you going to give that to me?" she asked.

"What—to keep it, do you mean? For yourself?"

"Yes—to keep it—always—for myself."

"Do you really mean you like it as much as all that?"

She could not help laughing at the ingenuousness of delight in his surprise.

"Of course I do. Did you think I wouldn't?"

"I didn't know."

It was more just merely than that she liked it.

Even with the dream he had brought her that morning, her battle, she knew, was still for fighting in Prince of Wales's Terrace. And here was a banner, or a battle-cry—something to give her courage when she was faint of heart.

He held out the paper on which it was written. She took it and read it all through again, while he watched her eyes, guessing the lines she came to and feeling pins and needles all through his veins once that he knew she cared for what he had done.

He had been about to say that he felt he ought to give up writing Poetry, because, as he had informed her and as all the world knows, Poetry did not pay. But this, of course, made quite another matter of it and when, folding up the piece of paper and just before she slipped it inside her dress, she put it to her lips and he felt on his own the kiss she gave it, then he knew there were a thousand poems to be written and every single one of them for her.

"Anyhow," said he, when he had informed her of this, "it's not going to prevent me from doing other work that pays better. Poems can be written anywhere, any time. I've written one with burnt match-sticks on an old envelope, when I hadn't got a pencil. Besides you see, if I wrote a thousand and sold them all at a guinea apiece, that 'ud be——"

He could not quite bring himself to say it would be a thousand and fifty pounds. That was stretching imagination just a bit too far. Possibly he could not write so many as that, or if he did, then they would not all be sold. But it was in the bounds

of conception for him to allow fifty pounds a year if he had any luck at all.

"Let's make a list," he said suddenly, "and see what I can make," whereupon they seized the opportunity of an empty seat and sat down.

When the sum of his possible earnings was totaled, by Jill ostensibly with fingers drumming on her knee, by John secretly, with unseen fingers drumming in his mind, it amounted to a hundred and seventy-three pounds.

"You see, I can make money," said he. "It isn't as if we were absolutely poor. That's three pounds ten a week, if it weren't in lumps. That's practically ten shillings a day—well—my goodness!" At that moment there was a shilling in his pocket. He turned it over and over in his fingers. "A good many people get along comfortably on less than that. And mind you," he added, "I'm only at the beginning. I shall make more than that. There's one author I know makes seven hundred a year and, of course, the big poets make thousands, but they call it work then and they do it every morning in a study with the door shut. I wrote that poem in a public house."

"Why in a public house?" she asked.

"Because I could get a pen and a pot of ink and a table to write on and it only cost me a pint of beer. But I shall make more than a hundred and seventy—you see if I don't—and it'll never be hammered on an anvil if I can help it. We'll make it together you and I——"

"Out of the virgin gold," said she; and when

she said that, there came a lump rushing up into his throat and the effort to swallow it made his eyes all hot.

Notwithstanding that here is a world where chartered accountants thrive at every corner, such talk as this carries more conviction with it to some than all the carefully reasoned calculations of common-sense. With common-sense you say: "We must allow for unforeseen contingencies. There are always miscellaneous and unexpected expenses. There are possible doctor's bills. There's the rainy day." There are, indeed, some of us who live just like the Irish gardener, waiting with his watering can, and you know what he did that for.

With common-sense, we reduce life to the quality of a funeral procession on the assumption that it is more pleasurable to be surprised at finding it a journey in a four-wheeled cab.

To Jill, as she listened to it, there seemed for the moment more truth in John's list and plans, set out there on the back of a well-thumbed piece of paper, than in all the reason and facts to which she had been submitted for two whole days in Prince of Wales's Terrace. The one had chilled her with the fear of life and all its responsibilities into a reluctant submission. This talk of John's had won her, just as a bird wins its mate, by the sheer, thrilling magic of its song.

He was such a child! Always she had known that. Something, while she was there beside him, gave her the longing to hoard and guard for him that money that came in in lumps. He had the

faculty for making her see him bringing it to her, like a child bringing the absurd things children find and hoard. He had the faculty of making her see herself storing it in some hidden chest until it assumed gigantic proportions.

"Did you ever buy a money box?" she asked him.

He had bought three. Ones you cannot open till they are filled up to the top.

"Not a bit of good," he complained.

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's all rot. They do open. It's a bit of a job. You have to get a hammer and an iron chisel. Then you can't use the box any more."

"Why didn't you wait till they were filled up?"

He looked at her quickly. She was quite serious. He felt the milled edge of the shilling in his pocket to make quite sure it was not a half-penny. Shillings play that trick if you do not keep a constant eye on them. Then he guffawed: "Bless your heart!" And in the tone of one who has more wisdom of the world than ever to be unable to love a woman because of her inimitable ignorance.

Chapter XV: *The Human Animal*

THERE came a bunch of children who sat on the seat beside them, sucking Edinburgh Rock. You know the noise.

They had suffered lemonade, oranges and gingerbread. Suffered is not the word. They had been oblivious. But even lovers cannot be oblivious to five children all sucking Edinburgh Rock. It is also an unhandy size for small mouths. Five children sucking it are as good as any one boy sucking a lemon in front of a German band. They utterly incapacitate a Pied Piper from playing his tunes.

John looked wildly about him and his eye fell on a row of cages where special foreign birds were kept. A keeper was standing by one of the doors.

It was the discovery of the milled edge on the coin in his pocket which decided him. He took hold of Jill's arm and led her over to the cages.

"Could we just have a look at the birds inside?" he asked.

There was chance here for such actual seclusion as they had not experienced yet. John even saw the possibility of moments, when the keeper was not looking, of holding Jill's hand, of conveying to it that pressure which, in public places, means everything to the utmost limits of your imagination.

Each cage was divided into an inner and outer compartment, the latter, certainly in full view of the public outside. It was those inner compartments John had had his eyes on. There was a door opening from each cage into the next. Opportunity was here—as they say in the advertisements—good opportunity for a smart youth. Already John was patting himself on the back.

With that eagerness to display his knowledge and earn his tip, which completely obsesses all those in office, the keeper took them from one cage to another, talking like a showman all the while, and most conspicuously in those compartments where the general public could share the advantage of hearing what he said.

"'Ere," said he, "'ere's a strange bird. Queer lookin' beggar, ain't 'e?" He disturbed a sleepy-looking creature from its enclosure, when it flew round and round the cage about their heads.

"This bird," he began with a deep breath, "is a native of East Africa. When Major Rawlinson went out on his expedition to Central East Africa in 1903——"

There was an awful note in his voice. It was the note of an alarm clock that has been wound up to its fullest pitch and you know will take an interminable time to run down. The deep breath that had been the last turn of the key. He had, no doubt, been more or less wound up all day and was only waiting for this splendid moment to set himself in clockwork motions.

And not only that, but it was attracting people

about the cage. Children—indeed those same five with the Edinburgh Rock still sticking out of their mouths—were climbing up to peer through the bars. Women with hats a little bit on one side and men with hats entirely on one side were crowding behind them. They all stared open-mouthed. The sight and sound of a man raising his voice in a public place is sufficient in England—in every other country too, I suppose—to draw a crowd of just so many as can hear him. Often many more than that. And this keeper's voice was just the voice that attracts. It never stopped for want of a word. It never hesitated in deference to the sense of what he was saying.

They had come into that cage to escape the increasing discomfort of the pressure of the crowd. Certainly that had been achieved. But a worse terror had been added to them. Suddenly, and without any warning or preparation, they discovered themselves on show. Jill felt like the fat woman, John, like the boneless man, exposed for exhibition in a menagerie.

For all that he talked of the East African bird, the keeper might have been pointing out their peculiarities to the crowd. It was upon them that every eye was fixed. Nobody in all that concourse cared, it seems permissible in these circumstances to say—a damn—about the bird. Yet in both of them—too tender-hearted for contingencies of this nature—there was that sensitive inability to be so rude as to leave him to his talk.

You cannot be inconsiderate to a man who drops

his aitches. He might pick them up again at your expense.

So there they were, trapped, caged and to all appearances the most popular exhibit in the Zoo. If Jill had tried to escape observation in the crowds, most signally and most utterly she had failed.

There is some instinct, low down in human nature —of which the showman of the menagerie of freaks takes good account—disclosing a morbid fascination for the sight of a fellow-being behind iron bars. It is the more morbid because it admits of no realization of the fact that there are two sides, even to an iron bar. Those without look much the same to those within.

"Can't we get out of this?" whispered Jill in almost tearful desperation. "It feels as if the whole of London were looking at us."

But knowing little of her fear of discovery and that deeper training in the school of appearances, John only laughed. He had not seen the look of despair in her eyes.

Those noses pressed against the bars, that heterogeneous collection of staring eyes and gaping mouths, were almost as funny a picture of human nature as he could well conceive. For there was man-kind, seeing itself in a cage in the Zoological Gardens and flocking and staring as it had never flocked or stared before.

Here was humor for anyone who had the wit to see it. John was beginning to laugh. The realization was being thrust upon him that the human being after all is an extraordinary animal,

far more extraordinary than the mandrill, or the okapi, or even the better known hippopotamus. You have only to put it in a cage behind iron bars, when all its movement become as stilted and ridiculous as those of any other caged beast out of the freedom of its natural evironment.

As the idea grew upon him, side by side with laughter, John put it to the test. He buttoned up his coat and a man in the crowd pushed another aside to get a better look at him. He blew his nose and two girls nudged each other in the ribs. He scratched the side of his head and one old woman burst out laughing.

Monkeys are not such odd little creatures after all.

"It was when Major Rawlinson, that intrepid traveler was two 'undred miles inland from Somoliland," continued the keeper, "that 'e 'appened to come across this extraordinary feathered beast." And for all the world and for the way the crowd stared outside, he might have been talking of them.

John was laughing till the tears were beginning to swell and overflow in his eyes, when suddenly he caught sight of Jill's face. She was staring, full of apprehension across the crowd.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Mr. Skipwith," she whispered, "that man in a bowler hat coming down the path. I'd forgotten he often comes to the Zoo."

She turned her back on the crowd while John watched his approach. Was that the man she would have married? Doubtless you cannot see

a man's heart at any distance, but you know, when he has a stubby gray beard that ill-conceal a pair of thick red lips, that he is no expression of Romance for a girl of twenty-two. Was that the man she would have married! John wished to God he had never seen him.

Of course, the crowd attracted him—the sight of the human exhibits no less. He stood like the rest staring blankly at first, then catching a glimpse of Jill's side face with recognition.

One swift look passed between John and him, and to John it was as a sudden revelation; such a revelation as when for the first time you meet the mother of the girl you love.

That, if she only knew it, is the most trying moment in the lifetime of a girl's Romance. Like mother, like daughter. In that mother's face, a man sees the whole stretches of the years before him; he learns something which love and passion and youth have hidden from him securely until that moment.

"In a paper 'e read before the Zoological Society," the keeper went on, now raising his voice a little, the better to reach the increasing proportions of his audience, "Major Rawlinson declared 'e'd made quite a pet of the bird before 'e come 'ome."

John slipped the shilling hastily into his hand. It was like throwing a boot at an alarm clock, but nothing like hitting it. They turned and crept away, while in the distance, they could hear the keeper still addressing the crowd:

"It would sit on the Major's shoulder while 'e was a-eatin' of his food——" they heard him say and they fled into the comparative silence of the parrot-house.

Chapter XVI: *A By-Product of Advice*

BEFORE they parted that day, everything had been arranged. If in the first encounter they had secured a tactical victory in Prince of Wales's Terrace, they would appear to have lost every advantage they had gained the moment John appeared upon the field.

They were to be married secretly. No other measure was possible. At home already, Jill knew she was being watched by the vigilance of her father who, like all Englishmen, conversant with the works of Conan Doyle, believed himself an expert detective. Now, having been seen by Mr. Skipwith on exhibition in the Zoological Gardens, it was sure to reach their ears, when observation of her movements would be stricter than ever.

They must be married secretly.

But how—when it is the first time in your life you have done such a thing and are feeling as if the whole world were looking on, with one hand full of confetti and the other clutching at an old boot—how can such a maneuver be accomplished?

In matters of this kind where the legal conduct of life was concerned and being one's own lawyer was worth more than twenty-six and eight pence,

or say nineteen, John always appealed to Mrs. Rowse.

Without committing herself to any admission on the subject, the knowledge Mrs. Rowse had of the law, argued a delicate intimacy with Police Court procedure. She said she gathered it, time to time, from her husband.

When under an anesthetic a lady gives way to language that makes one look up Burke's Landed Gentry to see who she was before she married, there is always this excuse to be made for her.

Had she been asked, Mrs. Rowse would probably not have known where a single London Police Court was to be found. It was undeniable, however, that she knew a lot about the Law and the very next morning, John appealed to her.

"Mrs. Rowse," he said, "if you wanted to be married in a terrific hurry—married quietly, you know—how would you set about it?"

She was dusting the mantlepiece, wondering all the time how she could keep her husband from remembering that this was the day he had breast of mutton, because she had already spent the money on having his boots soled. At the sound of John's question, she started. There was an exclamation on her lips before she could stop it. Into the bargain, she nearly dropped the old brass candlestick she was polishing.

"Oh, my good goodness, Mr. Grey!" said she. "I never thought you was one to get into that sort of trouble."

He declared he was in no such trouble at all. It was only that he wanted the information for a story he was writing.

That eased her mind externally, but insensibly she lost interest within.

"Thought it was you was going to get married," she said, with all those palpable signs of relief which are such exquisite expressions of regret.

So emphatically did he exclaim "Not at all!" that she regained an instinctive interest and was at once prepared to tell him all she knew. It was no little. Lizzie, her daughter—the one who stuck labels on the jam jars at Cross and Blackwells for a salary they are prepared to inform you is adequate in every way—Lizzie, since that Sunday when they went to Denham, had been married.

All that Mrs. Rowse had been through to get Lizzie married, and married quickly, she affirmed, was enough to give anyone an idea about it.

"She'd been walkin' out with this young fella for some time," said Mrs. Rowse, who, in preparation for all she had to say was already leaning for support on to the back of a chair, "and in Peabody Buildin's, it's 'ard to keep yer eye on a girl, everybody steppin' up and down them stairs like they do. I'd done me best. I'd warned 'er. 'Keep 'im at arm's length,' I said to 'er. But the length of a girl's arm stuck out straight in front of 'er don't seem to be much when she gets 'erself took proper with a chap. I dare say it's long enough other ways to go three times round 'is neck. Any'ow, she comes one day to me and she says,

'Mother, we're goin' to get married.' I look at 'er quite straight and I said: 'My girl,' I said——"

In the midst of this sentence, Mrs. Rowse wiped her face all over with the corner of her apron, dropped the cloth with which she had been dusting the mantelpiece and, stooping to pick it up, broke into a fit of coughing.

Between one thing and another, John gathered she had told her daughter, without any choice of words, that she was going to have a baby. This opinion, indeed, was confirmed in Lizzie's reply, for Lizzie had sworn she was not and apparently had got so hot in the face over it, that Mrs. Rowse did not mind the lie, so long as she was quite certain of the truth.

Her answer appeared to have been:

"The proof of the puddin's in the eatin'," which was a way of putting it that would not have occurred to everybody.

Anyhow she had gone straight to the priest—the priest who had recommended her to John—the priest at Sardinia Street Chapel.

"But 'e wouldn't 'ave nothin' to do with it," declared Mrs. Rowse, "when 'e 'eard the fella come from Australia, an' 'e didn't know nothin' about 'im, 'e said: 'No, I won't 'ave nothin' to do with it, not till I know the sort o' man 'e is and 'e's been proved in the Parish.' So when he'd finished with 'is 'ummin' and 'arrin', I went off to the Registry Office."

It seems at the Registry Office they had treated her very little better. Papers had had to be signed.

Statements had to be sworn to. All this had been very annoying because, according to Mrs. Rowse, it was a very different matter to swear a thing than just to have to say it. For instance, she had been compelled to swear the boy was over twenty-one.

"I wouldn't 'ave minded just sayin' it," said she, "and I wouldn't 'ave let anyone call me a liar, not twice I wouldn't. But it made me go 'ot all over 'avin' to swear on me oath."

There wasn't, she declared, so much fuss about getting married when she was a girl. And having been in the same sort of hurry herself, it had come all the more annoying when they put these absurd difficulties in the way of her daughter. She did not know what the world was coming to. It was getting hard enough to be honest on any account, but from what she could see of it, they didn't want people even to try nowadays; much less did they want them to succeed.

However, the upshot of it was that Lizzie was married, and in six months' time everyone in Peabody Buildings was consulting their memory as to the date of that day when she returned in style from the Registry Office. It would seem as if there were a brain cell, specially set apart for the indelible record of these events, for quite a lot remembered. These were they who, full of sympathetic interest, remarked to Mrs. Rowse how fortunate it was her daughter had not had to wait for a family so long as some they knew.

"I know a few in this building," Mrs. Rowse had replied, and in relating the incident she reproduced

exactly her tone of voice together with all the gestures of her hands. "I know a few 'oo 'adn't the decency to wait at all."

The sum of this conversation, while it gave John but little insight into the way out of the difficulties of getting married, yet brought him to regard a condition of matrimony he had scarcely thought of before. There would be children. He sat and stared at his breakfast until it grew cold on the plate.

For some reason or other he had not thought of this. He was just in love. He supposed he ought to have analyzed his feelings more closely, but he had not gone so far even as to discuss the matter with Jill. He would hardly have known how to begin had he tried. Indeed, frankly, had he been asked whether he wanted to be a father, he would have said: "Not all at once," or some such phrase that would not have pledged him to the definite negative. As for discussing the matter with her, it would have seemed like picking rosebuds to pieces to see how they were made.

Here then again, he was coming round a sharp turning upon this new world of reality once more. With a snatching of his mind, he seized the ringmaster's whip and cracked it. Surely it was not necessary to have children unless you wanted them. As equally certain it was quite foolish to want them if you could not afford them.

He was in love—that was all. It was like having found the complete fullness of beauty in the midst of, what to many, doubtless, was a dingy

world. It had no purpose except in first being what it was. The fact that it lifted some purpose in him as moisture is sucked up into the furnace of the sun, argued to him no purpose in the thing itself. Indeed it was its very unconsciousness of purpose that gave it the full essence of beauty. To make it utilitarian was at once to commercialize it. To commercialize it was to give it a marked value which would immediately enable anyone to capture it and put it on their mantlepiece, when idolatry would follow and the true sense of worship be gone.

There was a picture on one of John's walls—an old oil painting he had picked up for the mere whistling of a tune in the Caledonian Market. A man, writing occasionally about art for the newspapers, saw it one day and advised John to have it valued.

Notwithstanding that at the time he was in that chronic state of the need for ready money, John had shaken his head.

"Don't think I will," said he. "I don't really know whether it's an old master, but it's very beautiful to me."

"I quite agree with you," said his friend. "It is beautiful. That's what makes me think it's a genuine old master. You never get that sense of beauty in copies and of course you don't get it in the inferior artists. It is beautiful. Take it to Christie's—just for your own satisfaction—just to know what it's worth. It might be worth fifty pounds—might be worth infinitely more."

Fifty pounds! More! John looked at the picture again and already in that sudden moment, some of the simplicity of its beauty had gone. Though it might only be in his friend's imagination, yet a price had been put upon its worth. As he looked at it then he saw fifty pounds in bank notes or golden sovereigns and insensibly some of the quiet spirit of beauty it had given him had vanished.

"Good God!" he had exclaimed in a sudden paroxysm of anger. "Get out of the room! Isn't there one thing left in the world one can appreciate and value without thinking of it in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. If I had that picture valued at Christie's and they said it 'ud fetch a hundred pounds—a hundred pounds and all that inevitably means to my pocket—it 'ud lose all the worth it ever had to me. For God's sake get out of the room and take your commerce into Fleet Street. I hate a man with a mind like yours."

Assuming John to be mad, the friend had gone, when for a whole week following that incident, John had turned the picture with its face to the wall until he so longed to see the beauty of it again that that commercial valuation had been purged out of his mind.

And to think in terms of utility was no less to commercialize the value of love. In those moments of his importunate Youth he wanted Love, just for Love's sake, for the odor of its blossom. There was time enough to pick the fruit when the petals had fallen and the tree was yielding.

However, the only result of staring for twenty minutes at the wall-paper was a realization to John that the bacon was cold and not fit to eat. Coming to this conclusion, he put on his hat and went without another consideration to Sardinia Street Chapel.

Chapter XVII: *A Confession*

THERE is as much difference between an English Roman Catholic priest and an Irishman of the same calling as there is between a Presbyterian minister and a hunting Parson.

In those days—which in this story have always been a dubious matter and certainly date back before the construction of Kingsway—the priest at the old Sardinia Street Chapel was English to the edges of his well-trimmed nails and the polish of his boot-heels.

John rang the bell of the Presbytery in Lincoln's Inn and waited with none too steady a beating of his heart. Nevertheless, he believed nothing that Mrs. Rowse had told him of Father Peake's refusal to marry her daughter Lizzie. Going often and like a child to pray at the altar of the Virgin or the shrine of St. Joseph, he yet was no student of his religion. There was, he felt sure, something at the back of Mrs. Rowse's story which called for explanation. In bare fact it may have been true enough, but between the fact and the essence, there was room and to spare in all Mrs. Rowse's stories for the whole foundation of truth completely to be lost sight of. Probably Father Peake did refuse

to marry them and it was just as likely he had never had better cause for refusal in his life.

There was no reason, however, which John could see for the likelihood of Father Peake's refusal to marry him. He was in love. The whole world was radiated by it. That tremor which comes in the air over the sea and over the meadows, over the surface of the river, and over a field of corn, a tremor, when the sun is heating the very heart of the earth as though the air were a shimmering veil, trembling like a dragon fly's wings as it hovers over the stream, this was what he saw, everywhere he looked. The faces of the people he passed in the street were all illuminated by it. It appeared to turn the sourest expression into a smile. Indeed it played all kinds of tricks he could not have accounted for had he tried. He did not even try.

For example, it made grass grow up between the paving stones in Fetter Lane. It grew in tufts at first, tufts for which he arranged his steps so that he trod on it as he walked. It all began by his trying to walk on the lines where the paving stones joined, varying his steps to achieve his object. Then the tufts of grass began to grow in the crevices.

At last it was all grass. He was walking in a meadow. He was out in the country. Before he had come halfway down the Lane, he felt he could, in fact, be anywhere he pleased; the world itself had become immaterial; whatever substance there was to anything, was in his mind. It was as though he had on his finger a wishing ring and had merely

to twist it round to the first vague prompting of inclination. The only reason he could see why he did not make full use of it, why he did not go straightway to Persia or saunter down the streets of Bagdad, was because Jill was not there to accompany him. There was almost a tangible thought in his mind that he ought to be quite content to be walking on the grass in Fetter Lane.

All these sensations—mere balderdash to the modern day materialist—were accompaniment to the consciousness of being in love. He came down to the Presbytery in Lincoln's Inn Fields like the Prince in a fairy tale on a visit to the wisest man in his father's kingdom. The fact that the bottom of his trousers were frayed, that there were no cuff-links in his shirt sleeves, destroyed none of these illusions. He was quite unconscious of them. As for his hat—well, he knew that he wanted a new one. But if a new one could not buy respect, then certainly an old one could not keep a man out of the country of his dreams.

The noise of the eighteenth century bell, jangling in the far distance of the eighteenth century corridors, became his first link with reality. At the sound of it, not only did his heart begin a loud assurance of its pulses, but he grew suddenly aware of the frayed edges of his trousers, of the loose cuffs of his shirt. He made ready to take off his hat directly he was admitted within.

Father Peake saw him in that bare cold room on the right as you entered the door. Beyond the occasions of confession in the chapel, this was their

first meeting. The recommendation of Mrs. Rowse had been by letter.

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Grey?" he said, rather with tight lips, rather as though things could be done by machinery and done promptly, if only people would be sufficiently precise in their demands.

Instead therefore of coming to it gradually, of warming to it through all the gently increasing temperatures of conversation as he had felt he would do, John found himself declaring straightaway that he was going to be married.

Father Peake nodded his head, saying: "Oh, yes," as though it were a commodity they always kept in stock by reason of the common frequency with which it was required.

It was disconcerting. For when you can walk through meadows in Fetter Lane and it is a mere matter of choice that you are not sauntering down the streets of Bagdad; when it seems you are entering life through a golden gate and a flare of silver trumpets might be the least you could expect to greet you, it is a disheartening affair to have the announcement of your romance made in such cold and calculating terms as these, as though on a ballad-monger's cornet with the tin showing through the coating of brass.

Here was the first person to whom John had told his absorbing secret. Apart from the possible difficulties that might arise, he had been looking forward to this moment. In no small measure, that pleasurable anticipation had contributed to the ex-

traordinary growth of grass in Fetter Lane. He had imagined a warm and comfortable talk, tempered by fatherly and good advice which would not materially interfere with the realization of his purpose. This was like going into a shop and asking for sixpenny-worth of eggs; not even stipulating moreover that they should be fresh.

Father Peake listened with eyes that opened and closed like a procession of numbers indicating items of a large order on a self-recording balance. When John had told him all and was beginning to believe every single word Mrs. Rowse had said, Father Peake replied:

"Yes, and of course you're very young?"

"I'm twenty-six," said John, feeling not the faintest necessity to be dishonest about it.

"Quite so—and the lady?"

No names had been mentioned but John's.

"She's twenty-two."

"Very young," said Father Peake. "Dangerously young," he added and then, possibly catching a look in John's eyes, he concluded: "Attractively young—I've no doubt."

John felt a sudden heat in his blood and thanked heaven this was not the man to whom he had made his confessions concerning Amber.

To unburden his soul of that, he had gone one rainy day into the depths of West Kensington. Anyone with any sense would call it Hammersmith, suffering the loss of address to gain the dignity of the truth. There in the dim light of the musty confessional, he had emptied out his heart

to a priest who had an Irish brogue as rich as the notes of an organ and it had rolled between his lips like a song.

This confession had been made soon after he had first met Jill; indeed, immediately after that Easter Sunday when he had told Amber he was in love.

"Isn't ut the way ye were fond of the girrl at all?" the priest had asked him.

"Yes—of course I was—very fond."

"Then how was ut ye didn't marry her?"

"Well, we—we didn't love each other. She didn't love me. I—I didn't love her. We were just very fond of each other."

The priest blew his nose and it had been like the sounds of thunder in the cramped vibrations of that confessional box.

"An' what's the difference?" he had asked.

Such confessions he heard every day and all with the plaintive admission of weakness to overwhelming temptation. No such thing would ever have happened, they said, had they stopped to think. And the absence of capacity for thought, or it might be merely the inability of arrest was overwhelming in its preponderance. He polished them all off with such variety of penance as they deserved.

There was human nature as it had been since the fall of Adam. He had learnt something of it in thirty years. The thousands of years since there was a serpent in Eden had made but little difference. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was still growing in the human heart; still yielding in its everlasting seasons the forbidden fruit. Still,

too, it was forever being picked and the cry of vindication remained the same. The temptation was stronger than could be borne. There was not one amongst them who had the honesty to admit that the desire to taste had been so great that nothing short of the blight of God amongst the branches could have snatched the fruit from their hands.

He had often wondered when human nature would tire of the threadbare excuse, as he was tired of hearing it. And now at last, here was a young man calmly making definite distinctions between natural inclinations and the sacred impulse of love.

As has been said, he blew his nose, which he always did to gain time for thought when he was taken by surprise and then, receiving no answer to his question, he had asked again:

"What's the difference between being fond of a woman and being in love with her?"

"What's the difference," asked John boldly in return, "what's the difference between God and Nature?"

"Shure, Nature's a law," said the priest, "and God's a spirit," and wondered why on earth he had allowed himself to be decoyed into answering a question of that nature in the confessional.

"Well, that's the difference between being fond of a woman and being in love with her," replied John, whereupon he received as heavy a penance as he could well be given for his audacity.

Chapter XVIII: *Showers and Blowers*

NO such confession as that had ever been made by John to Father Peake.

Concerning Roman Catholics, this is a secret and should not by right be divulged. But, just heavens! If there is none of the blood of human nature to be found in the observance of even the strictest dogmas of a religion, it can have but little hope of standing the wear and tear of Time.

Had you a particularly intimate little sin, you would not care to go and unburden yourself of it to one with whom, like as not, you might be hob-nobbing next day over a cup of tea in your neighbor's drawing room. You would never be able to hob-nob with any degree of comfort so long as he was in the room.

That is why London is such a first-rate place for Roman Catholics. There are so many hidden corners. You can wrap up your ugliest of sins in an unsuspicious-looking parcel and leave it down some out-of-the-way, hole-and-corner side street, when no one in your parish will be one wit the wiser for your having committed it.

In the old days, when it was fashionable for ladies to wear their handkerchiefs in some ornamental way

arranged in the bosom of their gowns, it was the custom to carry two; one, so-called the shower and the other, the blower. Where this latter was carried, I have no pretensions to knowledge. It was not—as you might say—worn.

Now if you are a Roman Catholic—and it is not for me to say the loss is yours if you are not—you classify your sins much as ladies once regarded their handkerchiefs. Some are for show. These you reveal in the breast of your spiritual garments for your parish priest, who knows you well, to take account of. It may be you even sprinkle upon them some invisible drops of the subtle perfume of Romance. Ladies will know I speak more particularly of them. Whatever it is you do to them, there is a delicate odor you leave behind you in the musty air of that confessional as you go out. Your parish priest looks into the darkness after you have gone, thinking—that is a sweet woman. God knows, perhaps he may even draw the slow deep breath which goes with a regret too subtle to find its way into words. Certain it is he realizes there is something beautiful, however human, in your nature.

Of this type of sin are those delicate confessions of inclination and impulse when the heart has warmed the blood before the reason has had time to take account of it. You never really gratified those impulses, for contemplation by no means is fulfillment. Sometimes, perhaps, you may even have played with them for a passing hour.

They are those inclinations, sins of the mind,

which really you believe you were courageous with, but which often, if you looked deeply into the matter, you would find were affairs where opportunity held aloof and saved you much in the pricking of your conscience. Actually it was, that by the time the impulse had fully come, the object of it had vanished, swept away in those odd streams of life which bring things before on no less swiftly than they carry them away.

For example: you are not a lady who has ever stooped so far as to speak to a stranger in the street. God forbid! Kensington Gardens anyhow are not to be considered in such light of publicity as the open street; and in a train—well, it is the everlasting pity that English people are so obstinately averse to whiling away an hour in conversation with a stranger in a train. It is not to be held against you if you eschew the national characteristics of your race. You may have made acquaintances that way. Why not? But in the street!

And yet, perchance there has passed you by, only occcasionally, ones with whom acquaintance would have been at least amusing. What can you do? Life would be a dull affair without these impulses. Have you looked over your shoulder when he has gone by? God knows! Perhaps you have. Have you hesitated and gone into a shop, because to continue walking in your direction will not only increase the distance between you, but is likely to give him quite a wrong impression of what is passing in your mind.

Who, however, in their senses would classify a shop and the open street in the same breath?

Anyhow, it binds you to nothing. If a moment later, he also enters the shop, you are in no way pledged. You had wanted to buy something that morning when you set out. You can tell the girl so over the counter and in his hearing.

If, on the other hand, Fate is determined to preserve you from temptation and he does not enter the shop—well, of course, some men are fools.

It is little sins like this you wear for your parish priest. Cunningly you tuck them into the breast of your spiritual garment, just where they conceal the sweet attractions of human frailty. Little sins like these they are which leave the delicate perfume of Romance in that dark and musty confessional when, with your adequate penance, you set out absolved of all pricks of conscience into the world of little unavoidable adventures once again.

I am not suggesting that this is a sin peculiar to any lady. Heaven bears me witness when I swear that no lady I have ever known has been so tempted; and, without compunction, I subpoena Heaven again to give evidence, that no lady I have ever known has so succumbed. It is not a lady-like thing to do and to my dying day I will carry this illusion close against my heart, that all women are ladies.

It is only the men who retrace their steps, it is only the men who are not gentlemen.

Now of the sins you confess in the hole-and-corner chapel, far away in a remote district of London, it is hard to know what can be said of

them. There is but little of the perfume of Romance in their commission. Much more are they in common use. Still making use of that simile of the handkerchief, of some people it might even be declared that, in the matter of these sins, they suffered often from a cold in the head.

Heaven knows they are hard enough to admit, even to a man whose voice you may never hear again for the rest of your mortal life. For there are many holes and many corners and you do not of necessity go to the same place twice.

Nevertheless, there is no avoiding their confession. They weigh on the soul like clouds on the mountain peaks. The sky is not clear in your heart till they are told. Wherefore, in some out-of-the-way spots in London, there are priests who know—but, thank heavens, would never recognize you—for a shameful woman who, short of murder, would stop at nothing.

Perhaps the less that is said of these sins, the better. They arise out of the nature of your origin, wherefore the only consolation you have is that your ancestors into the remotest of the ages are more to blame than you. Like the handkerchiefs in the days when there were no reticule bags, they are carried; but certainly they are not worn. There is not a woman would let you know she had such a thing about her.

This is a secret that should never by rights have been divulged.

Now, when you see a lady wrapped in furs, or in any manner exquisitely dressed, who steps out of

her carriage and hurries into that chapel in the dingy side street, you will know her for one who is not incapable of mortal sin. Seeing, moreover, that you carry about with you, no less, all those human qualities which the more appreciate scandal the worse it is, you are bound to exaggerate her guilt. She may have done no more than speak the truth about her neighbor; but you will see her in your imagination breaking the whole ten commandments like a packet of slate pencils.

Undoubtedly the secret should never have been betrayed. It has little or nothing to do with our history and therefore there is no excuse for it but this: it was introduced into this wandering tale to show why John had confessed himself of the story of Amber to a priest in West Kensington, when his parish was that of Lincoln's Inn.

I almost wish I had never explained the matter at all. It is really no business of mine and perhaps it were as well for any who have been at some pains to read this chapter that they should be at still further pains to put it right out of their heads.

Chapter XIX: *An Engagement to Eat a Hat*

FATHER PEAKE had his point of view which he wished it to be understood was not his alone, but that of all the churches in Christendom. It was when he had learnt all about John's circumstances and had reduced that three pounds ten a week to its component parts of likely and unlikely possibility, that he voiced it and believed he was talking God's truth, accompanied by the soundest of common sense.

There is not the faintest doubt that his observations were compound of common sense, but whether the deductions he drew from them were the truth of God, it would seem to need the wisdom of God to say.

"If you take my advice, Mr. Grey," he said, "you won't think of marriage yet awhile."

John asked why. It was like falling through a hole in the ice into black water, when but a moment before he had been traveling on the surface with the speed of flight through the sharp, exhilarating air, warm with a winter's sun. The sudden arrest of all his hopes was as absolute, as catastrophic as this.

"Why?" he said. "But why?" and could say no more.

Father Peake spread out his hands. That it was not plain as the daylight convinced him how young this young man must be.

"A doubtful three pounds, ten shillings a week, may be enough for you," he explained. "It is scarcely enough for yourself and a lady who is accustomed to the luxuries of a comfortable home. It is certainly not enough with which to bring up children. If you belonged to the working classes—very good—very well. But you—you have ideas of comfort." His eyes fell on the frayed edges of John's trousers. "To have ideas argues the ambition sooner or later to materialize them. She has actual experience. In a year's time you would both find life intolerable. It is jeopardizing the sanctity of married life. You are risking the happiness of both your future and hers."

These were his observations. They were full enough of common sense to be a vulgar helping. So vulgar indeed that from that moment John was surfeited.

"But I'm not marrying to have children," he exclaimed. "I don't want any children yet. I want her."

If the matter had to be dealt with over a counter, then he presumed he had a right to make some selection in his purchase. It was not as if he had broken a pane of glass in the shop window and must take what came first to his hand without time to pick or choose. This was his choice. He said it

as simply as he would have done to a salesman who was trying to impose upon him a different class of article from that for which he had asked.

Father Peake reached out his hand for his biretta.

"I don't think, Mr. Grey," said he, "that you conceive the first simple conception of the Sacrament of Matrimony."

John assured him that he believed he did.

"It's just a sin if you don't marry," he replied with absolute simplicity, "and it's all right if you do. I don't mean that that's the Legal, but the Sacramental point of view."

Father Peake laid down his biretta on the table. Evidently he had something to teach this young man.

"A sacrament," he replied, "is a blessing. You seem to be confounding it with a license. Marriage is blessed by the Church for the procreation of children. That first—that first of all. Whatever pleasure there may be for those who participate in it, is the gift, the generous gift of God."

When John had been brought up as a little boy in England, before his parents went to Venice, they had lived for a great part of every summer in a town on the South coast. A strict, stubborn and unimaginative spinster with flat feet had combined the services of nurse and governess to him between the tender ages of seven and nine. Every day she took him for a long walk. Invariably she chose the Downs. In the scorching sun they would walk, what seemed miles to him, across those wide, arid stretches of the unsheltered hills.

At last they would turn towards home, when she would say in a voice that was like a hot wind blowing over a desert of sand:

"Master John, you can eat this cracknell biscuit and then we'll go home. You won't get anything till lunch time."

There and then, with an unslakable thirst, he would eat his cracknell biscuit.

A swift remembrance of this oft-repeated episode flung itself across John's mind at that moment. The whole incident, so far as it had gone, had been much like one of those parching walks across the South Downs. In all his remarks and his conception of God, it seemed to John, Father Peake had been as characteristically British as that flat-footed spinster. And now this commercial point of view, summed up in those materialistic phrases—the procreation of children and the generous gift of God—had all the taste of an arid cracknell biscuit in his mouth.

"Well, I can't afford to have children," said he. "Not yet anyhow. I shall be better off one day, when my books begin to sell. I don't say that I don't want children. I do. I should be miserable if I never had a child. So would she. I'm sure she would. But I don't want any for the first year or two, unless I made a sudden success and she—she was unhappy without one. But you seem to think I've no idea of having one."

"I take it," the priest interrupted, and when in argument a man takes anything, there is no getting it back again, "I take it that scarcely any man is

so wanting in self-respect or a sense of his responsibilities as that. No, Mr. Grey, this talk is not new to me. I have heard it often before and the more I hear it, the more I am convinced of the selfish ignorance which, strange to say, education has brought into the world. I make no accusation of willfulness when I suggest that your attitude is one of selfish ignorance. You regard marriage merely as an opportunity."

"Well, isn't that better?" cried John. "Isn't that better than finding it a commercial undertaking? I don't want to enter into partnership in a trade for bringing children into the world. I want to make my children out of love, not out of calculation. I'm in love! Don't you understand what that means? I want to be always with the woman I'm in love with—always—night and day. She's part of me. I'm incomplete without her. I don't feel selfish about it. I just feel selfless without her. That's all. I know now that, until I met her, I was, somewhere inside me, an unfinished being. I didn't completely exist. I was like something half-awake. Am I to be condemned to a state of half-expression because I happen to be making no more than three pounds ten a week? Is she to spin out the best years of a woman's life, waiting until I make a yearly income approved of by standards of the Church and if I fail, then either to waste her life or marry a man who can lay no claim to hold her heart? Is love nothing to the God we're told is love itself?"

"All this I've heard before," said Father Peake.

"Well, and what do you say to it?"

"Oh, it's an old argument, as old as free education, cheap printing and the modern pernicious form of literature."

"And what's the matter with the literature of to-day?" asked John.

"Well, in the popular form in which it is given broad-cast to the public, it spreads the new-fangled ideas about love and marriage. It popularizes divorce by treating it with levity. It is largely responsible for these very ideas about the Sacrament of Marriage which you have just been voicing yourself."

"Has it ever occurred to you," said John, "that what the modern literature may do is to revive the sound of the voice of God which has grown dumb in the churches?"

"Most emphatically I would deny that!" exclaimed Father Peake. "The voice of God in all the ages has never encouraged licentiousness. All these sensations you talk about—this desire to be with a woman day and night—all these the Church urges you to keep under control. They are perhaps the natural inclinations of sex, but a man must not allow them to master him until he can appreciate and is prepared to accept the full significance of marriage. Every man cries out that he is tempted —but no man, by the grace and mercy of God, is tempted more than he can bear."

John seized his hat and the next second threw it down again.

"Temptation!" he shouted. "I'm not tempted!

I mean to be with her! I intend to be with her! I'm not haggling about it with God on one side and the Devil on the other, wrangling for my soul. I'm not pulled this way about it and then that. I've not come here to whine to you that I'm tempted. I mean to be with her, now and always."

He walked across the room and back again and, talking on the flood of his emotions now, he was bringing up out of the well of his mind truths no reason could have stirred in him.

"Do you think," he went on wildly, "that a man when he's in love, marries for the righteous opportunity it affords? If there were a million obstacles to the advantages of marriage, you couldn't keep a man and a woman apart once they were absolutely in love. We aren't machines. Our souls aren't turned out on a lathe to a common pattern. Every man and every woman are beings to themselves, however much they must subscribe to a universal plan. You can't tell us to resist the inclinations of Nature and expect us to be slaves to its functions at the same time. There's no logic in it. A plan like that isn't universal. You wouldn't get a fool to subscribe to that."

"There's only one universal plan," said Father Peake, and wondered why he was wasting his time with this young man, "and that is the law of God ordained for the salvation of the soul. The body is mere dust and ashes."

"That's a very comprehensive thing to say," replied John, "but do you think you know the difference between a body and a soul? When you think

you're talking of one, you're in reality talking of the other. I'm not asking for the permission of the Church to take something that's bad for my soul. I'm asking for something that's good for me —that's a part of me—that I don't properly exist without. You say that this isn't your attitude alone, but that of every church in Christendom—well, then, the Church of Christ doesn't know what love is. It's lost it in a midst of dogma and losing it, has lost its only touch with God. Love's not a sin that can be overlooked with a Sacrament; that can be made tolerable to God by a device of the Church. It's not a vice that can be condoned with in return for an undertaking to provide new members for that Church which grants its qualified consent. It's not a disease to poultice and heal with a few prayers. It's something you can go down on your knees and thank God for it. You can't bargain with it. You can't turn it to account. It is the highest account a man can give of himself to be able to say he is—in love. Is that why you refused to marry Mrs. Rowse's daughter?"

"Mrs. Rowse? Mrs. Rowse? Oh, yes, Mrs. Rowse!" Father Peake was glad of any concrete fact in the whirlwind of these abstractions. "I refused to marry her daughter, Mr. Grey, because I was not perfectly satisfied with the young man. If I remember he was an Australian and they would not consent to wait even a few months to prove his good faith."

"That's it," said John. "Well, they were mar-

ried at a Registry Office and she had a child six months after."

Father Peake raised his eyes.

"I was afraid it might be something like that," said he.

John seized his hat and this time kept it in his hand as he strode to the door.

"Afraid!" he exclaimed. "Afraid? But hadn't they done the very thing you demand of them and without wasting any time about it? Afraid! Well —it beats me!"

And he was gone.

He went straight from the Presbytery into the chapel and put a penny in the box of candles before the altar of St. Joseph. When he had lit the candle and placed it in the sconce, he knelt down on the stone steps.

"I met her here—this very spot," he said, just as though he were talking to a man at the corner of the street. "And if there's anything beastly in the most wonderful thing in the world, I'll eat my hat."

That is a prayer; a prayer in such a humor as goes out of the heart like a bullet out of a gun. For whatever service it may have been to St. Joseph that John should his eat his hat—unless it increased the necessity for him to get a new one—it would be hard to say. However, it was at least a definite engagement and acted like a charge of powder to the velocity of his prayer.

Chapter XX: *A Prelude to a Family*

ONE thing was obvious to the most inconsequent intelligence after that interview with Father Peake. John would have to tell Jill all about it. If that were the mind of the Church on the matter, they would have to be married in a Registry Office as Lizzie Rowse had been, and marriage in a Registry Office cannot be explained in a casual, offhand sort of way.

You cannot, for example, say to a woman: "Come on, let's get married in the Registry Office, it's nearer." She will not listen to that sort of talk. There comes at once a look into the corner of her eye. Doubtless it is with her that marriage is so eventful a business as to require celebration in a place where all the world can well observe it. The faintest suggestion of anything hole-and-corner about it and she becomes as wary as a rabbit on a windy day.

Notwithstanding all her love for him, John was suspicious of the need for care with Jill. For in those days after their return from Venice, it was seldom they had opportunity to meet. She had told him so much that day in the Zoo as gave him at least to understand that all their meetings must be clandestine. For the greater part of her time,

therefore, she was close to an influence he suspected had only contempt for the things of his world. Never would he feel absolutely safe until she was his, all the hours of the day and night. There were moments when, with a chill sensation in the blood, he wondered would she be safe from that influence even then.

And now this Father Peake had flung an obstacle in their way. They would have to be married in a Registry Office. He must tell her and he wondered how she would take it. What was more, in his conscience, he knew he must tell her why.

He kicked things that morning as he walked home. The grass had disappeared between the paving stone in Fetter Lane. Even the smell of the earth from the potatoes in Mrs. Meakin's shop had not that same savor of cleanliness. He saw Mrs. Meakin herself, polishing her apples with the corner of her apron and when, looking up at him, she winked, saying: "They think they taste better with a shine on 'em," he railed in his soul against that false service at the altar of appearances.

Circumstance, it seemed just then, was pressing about him, conscripting him for the ranks of that vast army of materialists. There was, he felt, a mighty organization at work in constant motion, forcing one after another to discard the garments of their ideals and don the uniform, take up the weapons of the conquering forces of materialism and expediency.

Recruiting sergeants were conspicuous at every street corner. They came, sometime with the gay

rosettes of colored ribbons in their caps, telling you what a jolly life, that life of expediency could be. Or they came, like the devil at your back, turning and twisting a tempting shilling in their fingers. Or yet again they came with threats of the invading foe, the foe of want and all life's so-called discomforts.

Foremost amongst them all in those moments, appeared the face of Father Peake, and behind him a row of Anglican Churchmen, long-faced Presbyterians and seedy Dissenters. But they had no power of persuasion with him then.

"You think it hypocrisy now," they told him, "to conform to the conventions—but all life you'll find, as you get older, is a compromise. The whole basis of society demands a certain amount of the giving up of ideals for the exchange of its benefits and necessities. This is a matter-of-fact world. The only definite realities about it, so far as you're concerned, are the conditions it imposes upon those who want to get the best out of it. Obviously it is folly not to get the best out of it while you can. You're not long in it. Join the ranks, submit yourself to the discipline of facts and you'll find when you've swallowed your pride, it's not such a bad place to live in after all."

"Facts!" shouted John as he opened his door and then, taking off his hat, he flung it to the other end of the room.

It struck the blue and white milk jug he had bought at Payne and Welcome's the day he had entertained Jill and Mr. Chesterton to tea. It fell

with a fatal, ominous sound to the floor. The next moment he had forgotten all about the Churches and their materialism while he picked up the pieces and, with the sound of voices laughing at his elbow, tenderly fitted them together.

But Jill had to be told the truth. He felt that in his bones. It would be like stealing something from her if he did not tell her the truth. She must hear the advice Father Peake had given him, no less than the reasons of his objection to marrying them. Then she must judge for herself. And if, as he feared for some reason or other which he could not explain, she felt that marriage in this undignified secrecy was impossible, then, he had loved and could still love, while there was always his work to be done, which no one in the world could prevent her from reading once it was in the publicity of print.

They met again; this time in the gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields that are like an oasis of silence in the bewildering desert of London noise.

The gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields have an atmosphere about them that is all their own. That is true of every one of the open spaces in the heart of London, where Nature is given her plots of ground in which to plant a tree or weave a carpet of grass. Kensington Gardens, Charing Cross Gardens, the gardens in the fields of Lincoln's Inn and the many others too numerous to name, they all strike their note when, if you do but go there in the right spirit, you will hear it playing in the fancy of your mind.

If in Kensington Gardens you will find Romance, then in the fields of Lincoln's Inn is all that profound essence of logical common sense. In the gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields, you can spread out the portions of your life, like documents on a leather-topped table. You can tie them up with the red tape—of which there are miles and miles in all the houses that stand around the square—and, before you go, deposit them in the deed box of unapproachable resolution.

Who has the key of that box is a matter upon which largely depends the maintenance of the order in which you have arranged them. If she has it, you may be sure she will unlock it a thousand times, just to see how tidily those documents have been put away. And every time she shuts it up again, they will be a little less in order than they were before.

If, however, you have the key yourself and, as must be supposed, are one of those strong-minded individuals who, short of the compulsion of the law, will keep an iron will when once you have made up your mind, then you never look inside the box again. One day, however, when the orderliness of your life has become past endurance, you take the whole bag of tricks, lock, stock and barrel and fling it out of the window, exclaiming, as you do so:

"Well—thank God, I kept my word—I never looked inside—I never disarranged the order of the blooming things once."

So you stand before your conscience, strong-minded to the last.

It is not only the houses of the Law, standing around that silent square, which give tone to this atmosphere of systematic rectitude; it is, as well, the people you see there in the gardens, seated on the benches, or pacing its asphalt paths. In that midst of the rush of London, down Kingsway on one side and Chancery Lane on the other, it is the very spirit of quietness, the very essence of repose.

Only a stray lawyer's clerk, or a little typist late to her work are to be seen hurrying there. Only these break the silence under the plane trees. And you can avoid her if you like, for you can always tell the hour she will appear. She is as punctual in her lateness as the Law Court's Clock.

Between the long whiles of her passing, you may see a well-to-do barrister, sneaking an appetite for his lunch on the pretext that he has a heavy case to deal with and likes to stretch his legs to think. There is always the lawyer's old clerk, sitting on one of the benches, gazing through the plane trees towards that office from which he is drawing his pension.

He was the mainstay of his firm was that old clerk. He will tell you, at the first formal invitations to his confidence, that he knew more law than all the four partners put together. He was their right-hand man. They called him in for consultation whenever they were in any difficulty. Beckoning to you with his finger to come nearer, he will inform you in an undertone they were always in difficulty. They asked him his opinion in a casual

sort of voice, but when he had given it to them, they always said:

"That's what we thought. That's just what we thought. We're glad you confirm our opinion."

It was like sleight of hand.

He sits there the whole of a warm morning, thinking of the excellent opinions he gave and gazing across to those windows, wondering what the devil the four partners are doing without him.

Kensington Gardens, they say, belongs to Sir J. M. Barrie. If they have misinformed you on this matter, then it is because they have not heard that they belong to Peter Pan.

All these gardens belong to someone. For some reason or other, notwithstanding the thunder of the trains over Hungerford Bridge and the rush of the trams along the Embankment—sounds foreign enough surely to his ears—Charing Cross Gardens belong to Bobbie Burns. He has the air of proprietorship in his eye. Why he presides over that bandstand with its County Council music, I have never been able to discover. I only know he does preside.

And these gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields, they belong without question to Margaret. I never feel the inclination to give her her surname, I seem to know her so well. Yet there it is, in graven letters, for all they—like the little typewriter—that run may read. "Margaret Macdonald, who gave up her life to the service of helping others," and there she kneels, with her arms about all the *others* in the world. I am not going to explain what I mean by

others. If you don't know; if you have never seen Margaret, then you must go to the Gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields and find out for yourself.

To this rendezvous, early in May, came John, wearing the hat he had not seen fit to eat as yet. There came Jill to meet him, having gone ostensibly into Kensington Gardens and then slipped out, creeping into the first 'bus that was making its way towards Holborn.

When he saw her coming towards him down the asphalt path, he realized of a sudden the full awkwardness of the situation with which he was faced. He had to talk about babies. Well—that is easy enough when they are someone else's. But when they are your own, moreover ones you have not yet got, you need the callous, man-of-the-world air about you to carry the business through with any degree of comfort.

Now if there were ever a man in the world, less of the world than another, it was John Grey. He had described his whole family as a household of children, and at twenty-six, the years had fallen on his mind with no greater result than water on a duck's back. To talk to her of babies then, when his own ideas of them would probably have thrown an obstetric physician into a fit, was disconcerting, to say the least of it.

For notwithstanding Amber, and the intimacy with which they had lived together, he had retained about all women, herself included, a kind of knight-errant's belief that they were like flowers for a man to pick, if he could but win his way into the

garden where they grew. Not only did he retain a belief that women were like that, but that as such in their hearts they wished to be treated.

Knowing there were women who confessed to the thrill of violence; who asked that the man who rode into their lives should be booted and spurred, making a rape of love and carrying them off, wrenched in passion from their quietude; knowing there were such women, he still kept his belief they did not make confession from their hearts. They spoke out of a quality of reason and intelligence men had encouraged in them. They affected a Paganism of the brain, which was no more than the sensualism they had learnt from their men-folk. John felt it to be affectation and no more.

So it was in a more every-day sense, he declared all women were ladies, with a reservation concerning those who swore or spat on the ground. Whenever Mrs. Rowse or Mrs. Meakin met him in the street and bobbed, so that they hid the hem of their red flannel petticoats, he took off his hat.

In a work-a-day world—which are the first words at the beginning of this history and cannot be insisted upon too often lest it should be thought one had forgotten that it was—in a work-a-day world, there are men who think of women like this. It is to be admitted they most times keep their thoughts to themselves, for no man likes to be called a fool and in public will laugh at the woman who lets her hair fall down in pursuit of her intentions. There is no laughter about him when she lets it fall down for him alone.

But whether it were folly, or whether it were not, this was the regard in which John held Jill, and if any man likes to go back to his first love affair when the sound of footsteps beat up the pulses in his heart to the noise of hammers in a forge, he will find he thought much the same.

It was no easy matter therefore, as may be supposed, to talk to her of babies. Every step of her approach down that asphalt path brought him nearer to the consciousness of confusion. Directly he saw her, he came at once electrically to his feet and by the time they met, it might have been one of those odd adventures in the street, when the desire to talk, let alone the necessity of it, is so great that it overcomes all power of speech. Whatever it was, the whole place became a perambulation of babies. He fell over them as he murmured his words of greeting.

At this rendezvous he was to tell her what arrangements he had made for their secret marriage. As soon as she knew this and that it could be an accomplished fact, she was to announce once more at home her intention of marrying John, definitely breaking off her engagement with Mr. Skipwith. If still they withheld their consent—as was only to be supposed they would—then all the machinery was ready for that secret marriage if it were necessary.

Therefore she was full of potential apprehensions, alive with curiosity and as excited as a filly in a forty-acre field. But not for one moment did she show it to John.

Women are amazingly demure and never more

so than when there is a pulse throbbing in that vein in the neck, another beating in the temple, while unseen knuckles are rapping on their hearts with all the impatience of a postman who has wasted five minutes of his round talking to the girl at the last house but one.

She sat there in the silence of those first few moments, doing no more than perform those odd tricks with her parasol. They were invisible signs now she was making on the unimpressionable surface of those asphalt paths.

It is hard enough to know what a woman would be saying when, like Euclid in the susceptive dust, she can draw out the most elaborate diagram of her thoughts. And when she has no other medium than that of impassive stone, it would need something of a magician or an Egyptologist to decipher her hieroglyphics.

At last she could bear his want of comprehension no longer.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" she whispered.

He looked at her for an instant, as though he knew he was behaving like the most despicable cad in the world and then he said:

"We shall have to be married in a Registry office."

The lawyer's clerk, moving just like a dog from his seat which the sun had left to another on which the sun was beating down, heard him as he passed:

"We shall have to be married in a Registry office."

He knew the words well, had often heard them

in that room whose windows could just be seen through the plane trees. He heard the pitiable accent of self-reproach in which they were spoken and all the calculations of his pension, if supposing he were to live to eighty-seven—which was to be hoped—went out like a rocket from the mathematical functions of his brain.

Chapter XXI: *The Blotting-Paper Process*

HOW her face fell! She came down from the heights of the zenith in which she had been soaring, as a lark, with its song of a sudden ended, that drops like a stone to earth.

For whereas it may be one thing to marry in secret from one's parents, which in its way is a species of adventure and savors of the best traditions of Romance, it would appear to be another thing in the heart of a woman to hide that secret from the world. Some of the finest Romances in the world have set out with the adventure of a run-away wedding; horses galloping post-haste through the night, breathless parents, generally fat and always perspiring, following in pursuit, changes of steeds at wayside inns, then on again into the darkness, but always at the end of the journey a priest with the blessing of the church; something at least, when all was accomplished, for the world to hear of.

But a registrar of births, deaths and marriages for priest and a varnished deal table in a dingy office for an altar! It had all the suggestion of a shoddy business to Jill, wherein there was no color

of Romance but rather all the sordid appurtenances of a doubtful intrigue.

In those first few moments she dared not speak. She could not have told him how squalid the whole vista of life had become with just the mere mention of those words—Registry Office.

For here was part of the spirit of her illusion, that she needed her property of appearances to carry the matter through. So closely was John associated in all he did and said and thought with the doubtful advantages of Fetter Lane that in the surface consciousness of her mind, she had accepted it as a home in exchange for that good address which would have been plainly printed on the top of her notepaper in the establishment Mr. Skipwith would have provided for her.

Here was a courage which was only the less great by measure of the consciousness she had of it. There was not a girl of her acquaintance would have such daring of spirit. She knew that. She knew full well she was making a great sacrifice for love.

Only once, it is true, had she seen Fetter Lane and those rooms she was one day to occupy over Mrs. Meakin's shop, but the impression of them had been stamped indelibly on her memory. She was certain she would never let John know that she had made any sacrifice; but there it was, no girl in all the circle of her acquaintance would have done so much for love as she.

But this information of John's, sweeping out her picture of Romance, seemed more in the first mo-

ments of that silence than her courage could bear. A Registry Office! It was a place, she fancied it, in a dingy street where women who were divorced from their husbands were married to the co-respondent. There was nothing above-board about it. It was the last resource the State offered to keep people from shame.

Had he asked her to be married in a second-hand wedding dress, procured from a Jew clothiers in the Whitechapel Road, he could not have put greater strain upon her love.

And all this time, he knew it. There he was, sitting beside her with their silence, learning his lesson of how great a cad a man can be to a woman when love and passion and all the impulses of life are riding through his heart, driving all else before them.

Another moment of that silence and he would have leapt of a sudden to his feet, setting her free, giving her back to her world of less shoddy appearances and carrying his love away with him—a thing of patches but at least his very own.

Another moment the story of John and Jill would have been ended. The tears were filling in her eyes, mounting to the very brim. Had she suddenly turned her head, they would assuredly have tumbled out. Without looking, John knew the pools that were gathering. He had let her fight it out in silence; in silence but not alone. He had taken her hand in his own as it lay in her lap. But never once had the touch of her fingers responded.

Observing this action of John's from the next

seat, the old lawyer's clerk picked up those financial calculations where they had fallen and put them away in the tail pocket of his mind.

Everybody's mind wears the garments associated with their worldly habiliments. A woman hides her thoughts in just those secret places you might expect, as often as not threading them with a piece of colored silk ribband which serves no purpose a man could ever see. And when it is an actor, wearing silken tights, he has no room to store a thought anywhere.

In those tragic moments, however, neither of them were aware of the existence of the lawyer's clerk. That absence of response in Jill's fingers was accusing John with its silent reproach until he could endure it no longer. All that was in her mind he knew. He felt no resentment. Accused himself of a want of nobility, not her, and with every moment became increasingly conscious of the frayed ends of his trousers.

She felt the relaxation of his hand on hers as he was about to get of a sudden to his feet and whether she guessed its meaning or not would require more than the calculation of a scientific psychologist to determine. Whatever it was, she came to some mastery over her emotion of disappointment when she asked him why they must be married in a Registry Office.

Then it was possible to sneak a handkerchief out of her little bag and merely, be it understood, to blow her nose. No woman who is really brave ever cries unless the situation demands it of her. She

will make funny grimaces, or she will take violent interests, sometimes she will even give you the biggest of her smiles. But tears are things no brave or sensible woman ever wastes. They are her only real economy.

Jill's lip had trembled. Her forehead had puckered. She had pulled at a thread of cotton sticking out of the thumb of her glove as though she had wished to discover whether it were of Coutts's manufacture or a more inferior class of article. She had resorted to all those tricks a woman has need of when she is doing her best. Then, putting her question, she had blown her nose, after which there was every excuse in the world for any woman to begin that peculiar process of fishing for moisture out of the corner of the eye. It is like picking up a blot of ink with a piece of blotting paper.

Chapter XXII: *A Passing Memory of the Lawyer's Clerk*

ALL these pre-occupations, the lawyer's clerk witnessed from his seat further down the path. They set his memory in motion. He remembered the advice he had once given to the senior partner who was dealing with a tearful client, absorbed in the description of her husband's infidelities.

In despair the senior partner had come to the offices downstairs asking what the deuce he was to do.

"Let her cry," said the clerk. "Go out of the room and leave her alone. Let her cry."

"But I can't step out of the room all that time," declared the senior partner. "She's in my office. She's been weeping already for half an hour. I should never get any work done."

"Two minutes'll be enough if you shut the door," said the clerk.

This was the story as told in a moment of domestic tribulation by the lawyer's clerk to his wife.

And the wife of the lawyer's clerk had forthwith dried her eyes.

Chapter XXIII: *A Young John*

WHEN the blotting-paper process was done with and Jill, with her fight for courage, had asked him why they must be married in a Registry Office, John seized both her hands with the gratitude he felt.

"Why can't we be married in a church?" she said.

He began then in the most delicate way he knew, to tell her why and his conception of delicacy in these matters, consisted in going round and round, like a child in a maze, searching for a way out. She could offer him none. In her ignorance of the world of wonderful reality in which they found themselves, she had none to offer. From all that she could gather out of the rigmarole he gave her, the priest had no actual power to refuse.

"It's only," said John in despair, "that he makes a fuss about it."

"But what's there to make a fuss about?" she asked.

Well, then he had to tell her. But it would be scarcely fair to say how he managed it.

There they were, a pair of children, just standing on the door-step of a wonderful world and waiting for the door to open. Life was on the other side

of the threshold and what it is and what they thought it might be, may well be two very different things. To put it into words would be like looking up the meaning of the Holy Eucharist in a Nuttall's Dictionary.

They talked about babies, as it was foreseen at the beginning of this situation that they must. There may be those who have wondered how the deuce they were going to do it. God knows how they did.

Had the lawyer's clerk been able from his seat to catch an odd phrase here or there—which is not to say he did not try his best—he might have thought they were talking about a litter of puppies or a nest full of wrens. Creatures was the word in most common use. To call them just children and talk about a family would have been to use words, stripped of all their clothes. Some words are naked and in their conversation, all wrapped in the garments of timid suggestion, the word—children and family—would have stood out naked and unashamed.

Doubtless their talk would have made a doctor hold his sides with laughter. Free education had not taught them much. Again and again the blushes ran their nimblest out into the daylight of her cheeks. He coughed and hummed and hawed and found himself inextricably mixed up in sentences where the inevitable naked word would loom up out of the distance. In such moments he would drop the sentence wildly where it was and run like a hare into the silence.

These were terrible moments, all hot and sticky

and close. And what a relief it was when they had passed! But terrible as they may have been, there was yet the thrill of something wonderful behind every instant of them. Somehow the sunshine managed to beat into those awkward silences. They were neither chill nor dark.

There he was sitting out in a garden in the heart of London, talking about his children to their mother, when he had not as yet so much as got a wife. This is the quality of make-believe, having more of the truth for company than all the facts in the world.

Thus, even in so prosaic a place as this, with the houses all about them where the facts of life are forever being tied up with red tape, sorted, stamped —at great expense—and put away in japanned tin deed boxes, with the name of the owner of the fact painted thereon in bold gilt letters, even in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the make-believe of John Grey seemed at length more real to Jill than all the practical considerations they had of life in Prince of Wales's Terrace.

And when she understood that they must wait, just for those first few years or so, what more natural than that the time of waiting should all go by as they sat there on their seat under the plane trees. Two years! Three years! You have only to snap your fingers and it does not even matter if you cannot make a noise with them, when the talk is on wings that beat the air as strong as these.

"It'll be a boy," said John.

"Why do men always want a boy?" she asked.

"What do *you* want?" he inquired.

"A boy," said she.

And half she shut her eyes, looking out across the rays and the spaces of sunshine that thrust their way through the plane trees and lit with gold those patches on the trunks where every winter the bark strips off to show you that it's limbs are really clean.

You can guess what she saw.

A young John to make an old world new. A thing of breeches, torn and frayed, tramping towards life with all their beliefs, their faiths and hopes, polished and shining in his eyes. A young John, all sudden and unexpected, leaping out of a moment of love, like a bird, flinging out into freedom from its cage. A young John, shouting out the secret of their passion to the whole world, and caring, not the curse of a tinker who heard his voice. A young John, young enough to bear the treasures they had gathered in their minds, on into a distance where all those who travel can never hope to reach, but where the mere sense of traveling on and on and on is joy enough to keep their hearts in tune.

Under the falling soots from heaven that darkened the dingy houses and lay on the asphalt paths, there was no essence of fact about one of the things they saw, but it sent Jill back to Prince of Wales's Terrace with a tune in her heart and for the rest of that day, the two coppers John jingled in his pocket had all the music in theme of a thousand golden sovereigns of the realm.

Chapter XXIV: *Mrs. Rowse Reports a Case before the Magistrate*

BRINGING his cup of tea to John one morning after a complete and unexpected absence on the previous day, Mrs. Rowse revealed all the unmistakable signs of a black eye.

It was an accident, she said, while she and her husband had been talking.

The need for an explanation of this statement had apparently made itself obvious to others besides John. Mrs. Rowse had had to appear before recognized authorities who made it their business to interfere and inquire into these matters.

"No affair of theirs!" she declared with emphasis. "I don't want to deny my 'usband was a bit excited. 'E was talkin' and he thumps the table with 'is fist—so 'e does often and there was a glass a-standin' on the edge of the table and it fell off. If I 'adn't a been quick that glass 'ud a been broken. But I stretched out quick an' I caught it—that glass cost threepence—an' doin' it I bumped my forehead 'gainst the corner of the table. Enough to give anybody a black eye."

John declared he was under the impression that in similar circumstances he would have sustained a black eye himself.

"What they wants, 'avin' 'im up an' bindin' 'im to keep the peace beats me. Puttin' it all on the rates, as my 'usband says, as if people didn't 'ave to pay enough for bein' in the world as it is, without makin' it an expense for a man an' wife to 'ave a little argument about things that concern no one but themselves."

"So it was really the talking that did it?" said John.

From the leaning attitude which she always adopted when she had something of interest to herself to relate, Mrs. Rowse stood up to work again and began dusting and putting to rights as though she were suddenly conscious of wasting precious time. She did not answer his question.

"And I suppose you defended him through thick and thin?" John remarked presently as he sipped his tea and smoked his first cigarette.

It is as old as the hills, but always a subject of interest, that strange fidelity of the wife to the husband who beats her. Of course there is the wage-earning argument to account for it in many cases. It probably does account for the substance of her fidelity, but not the spirit of it. To John, with his ideas about women, it was the sin against the Holy Ghost, the inconceivable beastliness of human nature which impelled any man to lay his hands on a woman to beat her. And for the woman who submitted to it—unless for the wage-earning reason and the need to keep the children in bread—he had nothing but contempt. It was a desecration to love to conceive that it could be beaten like a

dog; for while the love of a dog was a beautiful thing it was the love of a beast for its master. But little of the beast was to be found in woman; but little of the master to be found in man.

The condition of beastliness was to be traced in women here and there, but that was a very different thing. The condition of mastery you might discover in many men. But to John, as he realized the sex, it was the spiritual beauty in the minds of women that would save the world from the ugliness of the physical violence of men.

Any woman then who submitted to the brutality of her husband and defended him against the law was traitor to the ideals of her sex in the eyes of John. He had no pity for her. He had no pity for Mrs. Rowse.

There he lay in his bed as she dusted his room, while a dispassionate mood settled upon his mind. He would sooner a man murdered a woman than beat her. There might be passion in murder. There could be nothing but the profane insult of disrespect when he struck her in the face with his fist or laid a stick about her body.

The more he thought of it and round it and about it, the more he imagined himself in the critical temper of the magistrate trying the case. He began plying her with questions, shrewd and cunning that made her slip in her statements and come at last to a worse state of confusion than she had been in the court.

There was no denying it at last. Her husband had beaten her. There had been the hell of a row.

The whole neighborhood of Peabody Buildings had been out to watch them.

He had come home drunk. Well, not so drunk —leastways not sober.

"Some men get the drink out of 'em with a stick," said she, "an' if I cries out 'e's 'urtin' me— which I wouldn't do, not for nothin'—it seems to satisfy 'im sooner. 'E doesn't want to do no 'arm to me. So I cries, but not because it 'urts. I wouldn't give 'im that satisfaction if it didn't 'elp 'im out of his rage. Only this night 'e went on longer than usual."

She laid her hand on her breast.

"If you saw the bruise I got there," said she.

John sat up, a blaze of emotion and anger, in his bed. There can be little doubt about it, that what he lost in the dignity of his appearance with his hair at sixes and sevens at that time in the morning, he must have made up for by the passion in all he said.

It was her lying her hand on her breast; it was the picture of that bruise she had brought to his mind which had done it. He felt this an insult to the sex for which he had nothing but reverence and worship, an insult too deep to be borne.

For if there were any one thing to him more sacred about a woman than another, it was that fount at which her child must take its first long draught of life. In the filthy savagery of war he knew it was the wont of an infuriate soldiery to cut off the breasts of women in an enemy's land. He knew that all through the history of humanity's

struggle through the swelter and ugliness of life, such deeds had been done in the name of all the highest ideals, even to that of Christianity.

But there, in his rooms—though it were only that Mrs. Rowse who, when a man is lonely, God sends to clear away the breakfast things—to see her lay her hand on her breast, to hear her say: "If you saw the bruise I've got there," it was more than his emotion could endure in silence.

He sat up in his bed, pouring forth a torrent of abuse upon her head that she should defend such a man as would thus insult and ill-treat her.

"You're his master, not he yours," he shouted at her. "If there's anything beautiful in life in Peabody Buildings, you brought it there—not him. If there's any suffering that's been borne, it was not him to bear it, but you, every time you brought your children into the world. Your children! Not his. You shaped and made them. You fed them. Half his life he's been looking on. One day there'll come a civilization when we shall organize life like the bees. Your man and his like'll find the slaughterer's knife at their throats then, Mrs. Rowse—and God knows—p'raps you'll be a Queen."

She was crying by this—p'raps at the thought that her husband's throat might one day be slit, perhaps at a vision of herself as a Queen—a vision resembling the figure of Britannia on top of the highest circus car in the procession. It was anyhow a sniveling business made up mainly of sentimentality, for she had scarcely understood a word he had said.

"I'm sure, Mr. Grey," she whimpered, "I'm sure you ought to 'ave been one o' them lawyer gentlemen the way you can talk. You ought to 'ave been in the Court yesterday mornin', sayin' somethin' for that young girl I met 'ere once—not that she seemed to want any one sayin' anythin' for 'er."

John half sprang out of bed.

"What young girl?" he asked.

"That young girl 'ad to stop a night once; slep' in your sittin' room on the floor, it was rainin' so 'ard the night before, she couldn't get 'ome. Wouldn't 'ave your bed—that's wot you told me. Said she was used to sleepin' on the floor an' slep' there."

Amber!

In some unaccountable way John felt as though a violent hand had seized his heart and shaken it. The ideals of womanhood and the civilization of bees went like a bolt out of his head.

"What was she doing in the courts?" he asked.

"Contempt. But there wasn't much contempt about her as far as I could see. Laughin' she was —made the beak laugh once. But 'e *was* down on her. Some money she owed one of them shops in Kensington. Down on 'er like a nail 'e was. 'You young women,' 'e says, 'think you can go about dressin' yeerselves up in this and that without payin' for it. D'yer ever think,' 'e says, 'of the fingers as 'ave tired theirselves out makin' the things you put on yer backs and the little they gets paid for it? It's a class of thievin',' 'e says, 'which is too—' and then he used some word or other—

'in this country and girls of your class ought to be made an example of. You've done this sort of thin' before,' 'e goes on. 'I find you've owed bills before an' it's most difficult to get money out of you, so unless this sum is paid into Court by to-morrow mornin' at 10 o'clock, I shall commit you to prison for the full term of seven days.' "

"What did she say to that?"

"She just shrug 'er shoulders," replied Mrs. Rowse, "and she says, 'Can't I begin my seven days now because there isn't a penny to pay it with. I've spent all I've got.' Everybody laughed at that —beginning 'er seven days then! Well, I see the sense of it myself. She knew she couldn't pay it by 10 o'clock, so why shouldn't she start 'er seven days without any 'angin' about?"

"What did the magistrate say then?"

"Oh, 'e got fair 'uffy. 'This ain't no laughin' matter,' 'e says, sittin' up stiff, then 'e turned to 'er. 'If you've got no self-respec',' he says, 'the sooner you learn what it is, the better.' "

Mrs. Rowse began to laugh.

"What d'you think she said to that?"

John might have guessed. He asked to be told.

" 'There ain't no need for you to teach me self-respec',' says she. 'You being there and I bein' 'ere doesn't give me no information about you, though it lets you into knowin' that I owe six pounds four and threepence,' that was the sum she owed you see. 'But it don't do more than that,' says she. 'It don't give you no idea what I feel or what I think. But sendin' me to 'Olloway,' says

she, 'won't do away with my ideas of self-respec',' says she, 'much as it may be intended to.' All that she says and 'e sits there listenin' to 'er, too dumbfoundered to say a word. At last he thumps 'is 'and on the bench. 'Be quiet!' 'e shouts out, and she stopped. 'Do you mean to tell me 'ere, now, in this court that you 'ave no intention of payin' even a part of that money to-morrow mornin', when you're earnin' sometimes as much as four pounds a week as an artist's model?' I never knew she was an artist's model, Mr. Grey."

John nodded his head.

"Go on," he said, "what did she say to that?"

" 'I might 'ave the best intentions in the world,' says she, smilin'—she was smilin' all the time, that's what raddled 'im, 'but the bill's six pounds four and three pence—and there ain't no place I know of 'll give me that much for a 'ole bag full of intentions.' Meanin' yer see that she 'adn't got no money—what she'd told 'im before."

"Well—did he let her off then?"

It seemed to John, notwithstanding the way Mrs. Rowse pointed the direction of purpose in her story, that it must end all right. He could not believe that Amber was in jail.

"Let 'er off?" exclaimed Mrs. Rowse. It was evident John knew little of the dignity of the law and of what that dignity is capable when it is affronted. "Let 'er off?" she repeated. " 'E just ask her was there anyone she know would pay the money for 'er. 'No,' she says, 'an' if I did I wouldn't ask 'em. It's my bill, not theirs and if I can't pay it

one way, I shall 'ave to pay it another.' Well, that was enough for the beak. 'E sent 'er off for 'er seven days without no more talk about it."

"She's gone to Holloway?" exclaimed John. "She's in jail?"

" 'Olloway was what they said."

John leapt out of bed and ordered Mrs. Rowse from the room.

"What d'yer want for yer breakfast?" she inquired as she went.

"Breakfast—damn breakfast!" said he and was stripped as God made him before she had so much as closed the door.

Chapter XXV: *A Mere Commercial Transaction*

WITH the assignment to the chapel of Unredemption of watch and chain, cigarette case and all those things on the fluctuating inventory of John's possessions, something in the neighborhood of twenty pounds had been accumulated to defray the costs of wedding, honeymoon and those miscellaneous expenses which are the very deuce.

This sum of money he was keeping in a drawer of his desk. There was no need to put this in pawn for its safety; no fear that any temptation would arise more inviting than the prospect for which it was intended. At the same time, it was something to look at. He counted it over every day, not from any fear it would diminish or foolish hope that it might increase. The very feeling of it induced a sense of power. With the touch of those twenty pieces of gold, he lost all those sensations that he was behaving like a cad. With twenty pounds, so long as they were not extravagant over the length of their journey, he felt he could afford to treat her like a queen. A couple of pounds had often been the complete sum in his pocket when he had set out with Amber into the

country, informing Mrs. Rowse in a casual voice that it was quite impossible to say when he would be back.

It was to that drawer in his desk he went, without thought of breakfast, as soon as ever the clothes were on his back.

Amber in jail! Punished at last for that casual indifference which amounted to the wildest ignorance of the value of money! Once before, as may be remembered, he had saved her from this predicament by the pawning of the heavy fur coat, just in the middle of winter, just when there was some good reason for its use. That it had not been redeemed again till summertime is an old story and bears no repetition.

But Amber in jail! He never stayed to analyze the motives of his sensations. All he felt, an impetuous realization, was that the indignity of it was unbearable for one single moment longer than was necessary.

In some manner, too, which he put down to a stupid egotism if he defined it at all, he felt that he, no less than she, had been insulted. His cheeks flamed and, from the graphic account Mrs. Rowse had given of the proceedings in court, it seemed likely they were flaming with greater heat than Amber's.

Always, as he saw her and indeed as she presented herself to everyone, she had been absurdly casual about the whole of life. If things were to be, they were to be. Such casualness in their own relationship had been more of her attitude than of his.

He recalled her words again then:

"If it doesn't last, then nobody's hurt by it; if it does, let it last as long as it can."

And another time when she had declared she would not fight for love if ever it came to her—she would not fight to keep it.

"My door's always on the latch," she had said, with a laugh. "Love's as free to go out as to come in. There's no good putting a bolt on the door when love's in the house. It must go where it likes."

And laughing then, in those days, before love came to him, he had agreed that love was like a cat coming into a strange house. It peered into every room, examined every corner and if you did not butter its paws and find a soft cushion for it, like as not it would creep out of the window.

He had no such ideas about love now. Now he knew it to be the spirit that enters the house of the soul and open doors and open windows can never give escape to the purpose that it brings. It was the only thing in Nature that defied Nature; the only part that was greater than the whole of life.

It was all this materialization of love, he believed now, such as the Churches made of it, such as Father Peake had advocated, which had given it that similitude to a cat seeking comfort in the home it found for itself.

These things his mind ran to as he seized seven of the golden sovereigns out of the drawer of his desk and set off for the court where Amber's offense of contempt was placed upon the records.

The wrench that it was to despoil his little hoard seemed nothing so great as for any other reason he would have expected it to be. Amber was in prison, a common offender against the law, yet he knew so well what she had meant when, according to Mrs. Rowse, she had spoken of self-respect. It was that same self-respect in him, which, as it were, had been slapped in the face by the fact that she had been taken, like any common woman, to Holloway.

He seemed to be learning in those moments as he ran, with some kind of fear in his heels, to the court-house, he seemed to be learning how there was a nobility of character conveyed in all that verbose report of Mrs. Rowse which he realized now he had known of always, but never taken, as it were, into account.

She might so easily have applied to him for assistance. As a matter of fact, she actually knew he had in his possession that twenty pounds. He wondered, as he ran, how many women would have chosen to go to jail, with all it meant in a world of appearances, rather than relieve him of the sum of six pounds four and three pence from his little hoard. In such a predicament any woman might have been excused the loss of balance, the inability to face disgrace even at the cost of knocking a hole in half a dozen people's honeymoons.

Yet all she had said when the magistrate had asked her if she knew of anyone to help her, was:

"No, and if I did I wouldn't ask them. It's my bill, not theirs."

This was the nobility that kept her a steady flame, whatever quality the purpose of her light might be.

He came into the office of the court-house and, swallowing a lump in his throat which had come there by ways he had no time for discovery, he looked through one of the apertures in the glass partition and said he wanted to pay a bill.

It took a deal of explaining and investigation, but the object of that court, as the clerk explained to him, being to recover money at any cost the law allowed them—dignity being the least of all—he was treated with due consideration.

"The woman's now serving seven days in Holloway," said the clerk with his finger on an entry in a huge ledger.

He might just as well have spat in John's face.

"P'raps you'll speak of her as a lady," said John, "when you get her six pounds four and threepence."

"Once I get that," said the clerk imperturbably, and as though the money were due to him, "I don't suppose I shall 'ave cause to speak of 'er at all."

That was a distinct score for the clerk. So clean a score was it that John guffawed and came back to a sense of humor.

For it was a funny business, this transaction over a counter to buy Amber out of jail. As he counted out the seven sovereigns and received his change, he would scarcely have been surprised had she been handed out to him, neatly wrapped up in a brown paper parcel with a little leather carrier attached to the string.

"Is she free now?" he asked eagerly.

"An order will be made out for her release, sent through to the Governor of the prison," said the clerk, "and she'll come out at once."

"Do you mind giving me time just to get down there," said John. "I—I want to meet her as she comes out."

The clerk looked hard at John, just for one moment, then he shut the ledger.

"The order has to be made out," said he, "then it has to be sent down to the prison. The lady will scarcely be ready by the time you arrive."

He might have been opening the door and bowing John out of the shop.

Chapter XXVI: *Peeping Tom*

JOHN stood outside the gates of Holloway prison and laughed.

The castellated turrets, the gray stone tower, the bastions, the ramparts, the massive high walls, all combining to keep Amber incarcerated because of an inability to pay the sum of six pounds four and threepence, seemed pompous enough to be incredibly funny. He stood at the entrance of the approach to the mighty gates which appeared to be shut against the whole world, and he laughed.

Suddenly he had sense of the humor of it all and no longer were there flames in his cheeks as he thought of the insult to her self-respect.

That so mighty a place should have been built for the imprisonment of a few unfortunates who could not pay their bills or who fell foul of the jug of beer, impressed him with the ludicrousness of life and all the hollow sham of appearances. It was like the gilt and marble walls of the Alcazar Restaurant or the silk and brocade of the modern theater or the countless dazzling lights of the common gin palace.

The whole purpose of it was nothing more nor less than a show—a circus procession—a combination of glitter and tinsel to catch the eye, not of the

child in a man, but of that weariness which comes to the spirit grown old in struggling for the things of no account.

For the child, though often it may be given and plays with the inexpensive toy which with its paints and its trapping apes reality, yet infinitely prefers the first inanimate object that comes to its hand with which to build a world.

All such make-believe as this, the tired spirit of most men and women have no energy to create. They must have their world all ready-made for them, wherefore there is gilt on the marble walls of their restaurants to make them think they are getting their money's worth in their meal, there is silk and brocade in their theaters to make them think they are comfortable when they are seeing a foolish play, there are a thousand lights in their common gin palaces to make them think the world a jolly place.

And with that towering edifice in the Camden Road, there are turrets and ramparts and bastions to make them think that a respectful fear of the law rather than an inward sense of honesty is the best policy in the long run of life.

Having no conception of the time it would take for an order of release to be made out and be delivered at the jail, John walked down the approach between the Governor's house and the buildings opposite, to the imposing door set in what might have been a medieval portcullis tower.

The old horse bus by which he had come—an ambling pirate with no fixed schedule of price

or time—had seemed that morning the slowest thing on earth. Every hansom that had passed them, he imagined contained the messenger bearing the order for her release. He wanted to make sure he was not late. He knocked with the heavy knocker on the postern door and would not have been so much astonished, as mildly interested, had it been opened by a man in a cuirass and a leather jerkin, with good rich medieval oaths all ready to his lips.

The smaller door, inlet with a monastic-looking grille, opened and he was faced by a warden or gatemen in a black uniform who rang a bunch of keys in his hand as though to make atmosphere and create an unmistakable impression. He was a bearded man, wearing that type of well-trimmed beard that looks as though it were made of black horse-hair and steel turnings. His expression was still and cold. The look in his eyes told John he was incapable of all response but such answers as he no doubt had learnt by heart.

He was far worse than a man with medieval oaths, with cuirass and leather jerkin. Such a one might have beaten your body. This man could torture your soul.

The sudden impression that John received as he looked at him was that civilization had become more cruel than ever it was in the days of the Thumb-screw and the Scavenger's daughter. It had learnt that man has a mind as well as a body to torture, yet was still in ignorance that the torturing of the mind was not so much more punishment as a poisoning of the soul.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," he began, though trouble would appear to have been the last emotional state of which he was capable, "but I'm waiting for—a lady. She's—she's—well, she's coming out very shortly. They're sending an order to the Governor. That's what they told me and—well, I didn't want to miss her. I thought perhaps you could tell me if you'd seen her go by. She's rather tall—she's young—well, about twenty-three—and —and tall—well, I said that—with brown eyes. They do come out this way, don't they?"

He looked at the great gates with their iron bars which still further kept the way into the inner courtyard beyond. To him, with his freedom, standing there, it seemed like another world, a world of caged souls, more silent than any grave.

The official waited in silence while John stammered out his inquiries. His eye was like an implement you might pick a lock with and he pierced it into John's brain, not as John imagined, however, to discover his relationship with Amber, but merely in calculation as to whether there were a promise of a tip.

"They do come out this way, don't they?" repeated John.

"They come out this way," he said with a strong, rasping voice, "and they goes in."

"She—she came in yesterday," said John, hoping that might help.

"So did others," replied the official to the proper accompaniment of his keys.

"It's only a debtor—a debtor's case," John ex-

plained quickly, giving him every assistance to jog his memory. But apparently, behind that cold eye with its penetrating glance as though it trusted no man, there was no memory to distinguish between ordinary debtors and common drunks. What is more, there seemed to be a kind of pride that stiffened the horse-hair beard with its steel turnings, a kind of pride that, having served so long in his Majesty's service, all memory about such matters as these was scarcely worth while. He left it to John to estimate what worth it had.

"Well, has anyone come out—been released I mean—in the last hour or so?" he asked.

"There's always people coming out," replied the official, "but it's not for me to know 'ave they been released for debt or drink. If they've got any pride about them, they walk as though they'd come in by mistake and 'ad just found the right way out. 'Oh,' they says when they sees the door open, as though it was shut last time they came by and they 'adn't noticed it."

John put his hand in his pocket and at that movement all the penetrating look of the sharp implement vanished out of the official's eye. He cast a glance behind him and on through the iron gates. Then he made a movement of suppressed swiftness to a small room at the side, evidently his office.

"Would you like to come in 'ere for a moment, sir, while you're talkin'?"

His voice no longer rasped. You could not have filed through a ginger-beer wire with it. From somewhere behind the waistcoat of that black uni-

form, it had caught a human note, coming from some inner man that hid, concealed, behind that official exterior.

There in his little office, with its high desk and its stool—the only furniture around the whitened walls—there followed a transaction for which no receipt but that of muttered gratitude was forthcoming; a transaction which no officer in his Majesty's Service would probably understand, since, as in John's case, it produced nothing of any value.

"If you wait outside, sir," said the officer as they came out again, "you'll most likely see the lady comin' out. They all comes out this way."

Which he might have said in the first five minutes. It was only the tone of voice that had changed by reason of that mysterious transaction in the little room. Seeing, however, that he could have made no greater concession short of stripping off his uniform and standing there as it might be in the service of God rather than of the King, he felt he had fulfilled his duty by the exchange.

Nevertheless, as John was there to purchase information and not manners, the outcome of the affair might have been disagreeable had not Amber at that moment, accompanied by a wardress, appeared in the inner court on the other side of the big iron gate.

With a sudden sensation that he was prying upon something he should never have seen—a feeling that he was a Peeping Tom in the empty streets of Coventry—John pressed back against the wall as

the officer hurried forward with his keys and unlocked the iron gate.

The wardress handed him a paper. He looked at it with his official eye. He stood aside and let Amber pass through. Straight ahead of her she looked, conscious that a figure was standing there, but never for an instant letting her eyes dwell on John.

Officially the keeper passed to the second gate, with its smaller door which he unlocked and threw open to the wide approach and the street beyond.

She made a little movement of surprise and, "Oh," she said, just as though she had come that way but a moment before and had never realized there was that means of exit.

Still then, without looking to right or left of her, she stepped out into the world again and the officer swung the door to after her.

"That was a debt," said he to John. "Most of 'em goes out like that. 'Eard 'er say, 'Oh,' did you? I suppose she wasn't the lady."

"I'll take your advice," said John. "I'll go outside and wait."

Chapter XXVII: *The Release*

JOHN allowed Amber to keep her distance until she had turned into the Camden Road; in a few strides, then, he was at her shoulder. Evidently the sensation that she was being followed had conveyed itself to her through the sound of his footsteps. He saw her body stiffen, her head set in the rigid pose with which a woman prepares to meet a disagreeable encounter.

In an illuminated instant, he realized what was happening in her mind. She had just come out of prison. Here, she thought, was one of the hawks that hover over these situations in a woman's life, the moments when she is without friend or counsel, when she is susceptible to the offer of help from the first who comes her way.

Seeing who it was, there was an unavoidably comic side to the affair. It intrigued him to an impulse of mischief. Had it been the most inconsiderate of practical jokes, he could not have resisted it then. But it was not inconsiderate. The sooner she saw the humor of the whole situation, debt, imprisonment, release and all, the better, though it was doubtful in Amber if she could ever lose her sense of humor for long.

Increasing the length of his stride, John came alongside of her.

"Excuse me," said he behind her shoulder.

She hurried on, looking straight ahead of her. Even with the sharp glimpse of the profile he had, he felt he could see her eyes flashing with an angry determination. And then as she walked, with John just behind her, she started humming a tune, audibly so that he, whoever he might be, should hear and learn thereby what little consciousness she had of his presence.

That made the laughter rise in his throat.

"Amber," said he. He could persist with the joke no longer.

With a little cry on her lips, she stopped and turned. Then, as he knew she must, she saw the comic ridiculousness of it all and just stood there shaking with laughter. They both laughed together. Nothing, it seemed, could stop them, until suddenly, and he could scarcely see when the change had begun, her laughter turned and with a little snap had broken. At one moment her lips were parted in the animation of merriment and the next they were trembling to tears. At one moment she was looking the picture of mirth and the next that queer grimace she made when she cried assumed the place of it. Her eyes, her button of a nose that always flung the fullest compliment of beauty aside to keep a spirit of joy, the whole of her face all crinkled up in a ludicrous expression of weeping. The next instant she was hanging tightly on to his arm and walking him on down the Camden Road,

half-hiding her head in the bend of his elbow that none of the passers-by might see what a fool she was.

Following by instinct the precept of the lawyer's clerk, he let her cry it out. There was nothing to say, nothing to be done. Those tears had made their appearance, synchronized with her full realization that he had paid her debt; that he had set her free; that he it was who had been waiting at the prison gate for her; that he—but beyond that, nor daring to let her mind travel into the country of dreams, she could not go. There arose an impassable barrier and at that barrier, the tears had suddenly driven, a hot and blinding rain, in her eyes.

When those sounds and movements by which you guess a woman is crying—for you must not look—had subsided, she let go her holding of his arm.

"You should never have done it," said she, blowing her nose—the old process, the crumpled piece of blotting paper screwed into the serviceable pad. "You know you can't spare it. I didn't mind—once I was there. And what's seven days! Once you get in a place like that, you feel as though seven days were nothing. It's filled with the ghosts of people who've spent years there and they keep on whispering: 'Seven days! Seven days! That's only a week! Think of fifty-two weeks—and then multiply that by seven!' "

"Rather rough on you," said John.

"Why?"

"Well—of course you couldn't do it."

She stopped him short in the road and she pressed her hand on his arm.

"Thank you for that," said she.

"For what?"

"For that. I was beginning to take it seriously." After that they walked on. They were near the Camden station before they spoke again.

"I'll pay it back as soon as I can," she said then. "When do you want it? When are you going to be married?"

He related to her all the difficulties that had arisen because of Father Peake, since last he had seen her at *Le Pauvre Monsieur*. Hearing his account of the matter, she lost her temper with it all. It was honest wrath. There was little of the play-actress about her. There was no respect for dogma or the precepts of the Church in the whole gamut of her composition. She was Pagan to the tips of her fingers, to the tilted button of her nose. Respect for creeds with her had vanished the first moment she had had to set out and face life on her own, and that had been when she was little more than fifteen.

What her philosophy was, it would have been hard to say. It is doubtful whether she knew what morality meant. She did what came to her heart to do and all that came to her heart came with a wild and odd sense of nobility. Coming or going, she hesitated at nothing that fell her way and would let the best slip out of her hand.

Life was a game to her, an adventure, a voyage of discovery, an exploration in the jungle of Time.

She met things as they came, with the look of that broad space she had between the eyes. Pride ruled and tenderness led her. She never could have told you where she was between the two. Pride would have bid her ride a horse to death rather than fail in her enterprise, while tenderness would have bid her give her life rather than break its heart.

Here she was in the Hampstead Road, flinging out incoherent invectives against a Church that was doing no more than interfere in a matter which was like to make the deepest scar in her life. There was no accounting for the nobility of it in her. It came to her heart and she did it. That church with its Father Peake and its gospel of expediency, might have served her purpose well. With the barrier once raised between John and Jill, he might well return to her. With some quality more of heart than understanding, she sensed the child in him. His return to her that night in the Hogarth Road was far more the return of a child to a lap that would take its head to a breast that would hide its tears. Far more was it that, than the return of a man to his desires to drown the bitterness of his despair. Nevertheless, she had sent him away and lost her chance of giving him belief.

A laugh ever came to her lips—though it did not reach her eyes—as she stood by, looking on, hearing herself thus shouting odds against her chances.

"The Church makes me sick!" said she. "Good Lord! Haven't you got to go through Life before you get to Heaven. And surely, isn't life what's given you, you never asked for it—and isn't heaven

what you make! What a dismal place those people must make of it who fill their hearts with the sourness out of life. Not to take happiness in this world, it seems to me, is to drive yourself to hate the God that made it. Take happiness—that's what I should do—take it all, all you can get, and then your heart'll make a heaven worth striving for."

And there was she making a hell for herself yet finding what heaven she could in the desire for his attainment.

John looked at her with the slant of his eyes. Suddenly he had acquired vision—the vision that had come to him that night when she left him in Fetter Lane. He saw that laughter on her lips and came to understanding of the absence of it in her eyes.

The whole fretted maze of life closed in about him then when he realized that whatever way you turn, pain is the accompaniment of pleasure, sorrow the complement of joy. It seemed he was driven to his wits' end. He dared not look at her face again. He loved—nothing could shake that knowledge, nothing lessen it, nothing alter the pulses of his heart. Indeed the more he sensed the pain she had with every word she spoke beside him, the more he knew how deep his love had gone, while at the same time the less he could bear the suffering he brought.

Love had cleansed his eyes. It had spread his vision. Now love was chastizing him with every word she uttered and all the pain of every swing of the lash was a thing that hurt and bit deep into

his soul but which he would not have avoided for all the ease and all the content the world could offer him.

As they came down the Tottenham Court Road, he pointed out a 'bus that would take her home. She bent her head, well understanding all that little service meant from him.

One instant then she raised her eyes and looked directly in his face.

"You're going to be happy one day, John," she said. "All these difficulties are going to be pushed away. They'll come—the long, quiet days—I'm sure love brings them—I'm sure they'll come to you. And supposing they never should—well—you have loved, haven't you? Do you think I don't know it was love of her that brought you out there to me to-day?"

That she said—the last words quicker than the first, as though she must speed their parting from her lips before tears reached them. With a smile and a wave of her hand then, she had jumped on her 'bus and was gone.

John stood there on the pavement, watching her out of sight and over and over again as the carts and 'buses crossed and hid her from his view, he kept saying to himself:

"How quickly life swallows you up."

Chapter XXVIII: *A Matter of Honesty*

IN getting married at a Registry Office—which for all the world is like going into a second-hand clothier's shop and purchasing a brand new suit, for when you come out you scarcely know yourself and expect every second person to stare at you in the street—in getting married at one of these places, it is necessary to have witnesses.

You may call one of them the best man if you like. You may call both of them the best man and leave them to fight out afterwards their rights to the grammatical comparison. It makes no difference. All they have to do is to sign their names.

Another matter to your advantage, saving time, is that there is no—giving away. In this, it is like all other affairs of business in which you have ever found yourself concerned.

When in church, for example, the priest says: "With silver and gold I thee wed," there is always that awkward moment when you fumble for the half-sovereign which is the largest piece of gold you can afford and for the crown which is the largest piece of silver you can get, for there are holes in the trouser pockets of even wedding garments. What is more, only one possessed of the dignity of poverty can ever afford to ask for that

money back again once he is outside the church, in order to pay for the wedding breakfast.

In a Registry Office you are saved all such annoyances as these. It is a plain and straightforward matter of business between the eager party longing to buy and the indifferent party prepared to sell. Once you have secured the witnesses to your transactions, you cannot go wrong, unless you have lost the ring, when it is not so much the law as the woman who is particular about that.

From what quarter, however, was John to secure his witnesses without blazoning the fact of his wedding to the four corners of Fetter Lane—which, if you know the locality, you will realize would mean a climbing up to the house tops?

In this quandary, he was thinking of Jill and not of himself at all. It would be a proud enough moment for him. But there was a sensation sometimes, not so much in his bones as in the epigastrium, that she would feel, and perhaps deeply, the contrast between those rooms above Mrs. Meakin's shop and that mansion of his imagination in Prince of Wales's Terrace.

For what did he know of Jill? Nothing but what his mind had conjured out of the persistent sense of beauty with which he lived. Of her encounter with her parents, she had given him no relation but their disapproval. From her own lips he had heard no word of that realization of madness to which she had come and which had held its way with her until their meeting and the music of the pipes he had played in the Zoological Gardens.

One revelation only he had had of her—the sight of Mr. Skipwith as he passed through the crowd to see the human exhibits in their cage. She had once been prepared to marry that man in the bowler hat with the stubbly gray beard. She had been prepared to marry him after she had lain in John's arms, had felt his kisses on her lips and known that love was the truth of everything the world could ever hold.

It might have been his arms, or those of any other man's. It mattered not the curse of a tinker whose kisses they had been. What had mattered, was that it was love, the absorbing passion of it, and for the sake of her duty to the god of appearances, she had been ready to set it aside.

No doubt, as she had told him, she was to marry a white man. His heart was in the right place. She felt the deepest respect for him. But whiteness or blackness, good or evil, these as you, if you have cared, well know, have nothing to do with love.

Love makes its own good. The virtue to one in another where there is no love, is like a plant forced in a hot-house. There is something exotic about it; something bloodless and unreal. The sun is the well-spring of life and every flower that blooms in its warmth has the scent of the sun in its petals. Virtue without love is a flower out of season, and scentless in the nostrils of God.

With this revelation in his mind, John had a fear in his heart no words could have given substance to. In addition that sensation in his stomach—

and coming from that quarter never to be regarded with real respect—sometimes suggested to him he was behaving like a cad.

Would it be the more honest thing, or merely mock heroics, to give her up; to tell her that life, with all the wonder it had for him in that environment was yet not good enough for her?

These were questions that assailed him out of the reality of his new world. For there were moments, as when the hawkers were coming down from Covent Gardens in the early morning, or when he had to say "Good-day" to Mrs. Morrell on the stairs—Mrs. Morrell who did spit on the ground and therefore was not recognized in the street—such moments when he wondered whether he had willfully deceived Jill as to the conditions of life she would have to make her own.

Chapter XXIX: *Births, Deaths and Marriages*

TO save Jill from any discomfort she might feel in the event of the neighborhood being aware of their wedding, it was essential for John to obtain witnesses who had no business with the life of Fetter Lane.

For marriage in that part of the world is a considerable affair. A birth is nothing. For sheer interest, death surpasses it in all qualities of attraction. With death there is usually evidence of some emotion, but with a birth—none; unless it be the disgust of the father upon the increase of his responsibilities. Seeing, however, that he cannot well vent his anger upon his wife at a time like that, a badly cooked dinner any day is better than a birth, since it has some immediate chance of leading to a row.

Again, a birth costs anything from half-a-crown to ten and six, which is no great excitement in the way of expenditures. For being, as it is, the civilized equivalent of the expression of force, the spending of money is no less exciting to those who spend it than to those who look on. The sight of a millionaire writing a check for five thousand

pounds is as thrilling now as was a pitched battle in the age of stone.

A birth then, with its utmost capital outlay of ten and six, is nothing. But a funeral, well, there are vehicles actually stopping at the door. You can look out of your own window, which costs you nothing, and calculate how much they have spent on the coffin and the hearse.

There may be flowers and you may know the green-grocer's shop that supplied them. At sometime or another in the proceedings, there is a feast. Every mourner wears a garment for the occasion which is almost as rich a food for speculation as the washing you see hanging on the line in your next-door-neighbor's yard. And all these things cost money; they are all civilized expressions of the expenditure of brute force and dynamic energy.

These are the attractions about a funeral which you do not get down your street when yet another child comes stumbling down the well-worn path on to the dusty highway.

But a wedding! That beats them all. At a wedding you can resort to an exhibition of brute force yourself. You can throw things. The parties concerned are in that state of mind when they will submit to it. The youngest child in the neighborhood can participate in a wedding.

What the bride wears, where she got the stuff and how she made it up with the sewing machine she borrowed, to you, looking out of your window, there is something absorbing in all that. You may have lent her the machine. You may have lent

her the machine and she has not asked you to the wedding. Consider the liberty that gives you to be generous with a piece of your mind!

As well as all this, there is every bit of scandal, every bit of gossip, every bit of romance that can be discussed while they are squeezing—six of them under a shower of confetti—into a four-wheeled cab.

There will be more than one in the street who will know where the bridegroom hired his suit of clothes for the occasion. There will be glimpses of the bride's going and of her coming back; endless speculations as to how she will like it now she has got him; how hard she did try to get him, or how hard he did try to get her; or yet again how quick they went and did it and how it will all turn out.

There will be sighs from the girls who are not married and doubtless giggles from the women who are. But everybody will be laughing, which is one advantage a wedding has over a funeral.

And last of all, there is that indefinable feeling of curiosity in the breast of every woman who looks on. It is mostly women who do it. Eve began it. As the Great Mr. Chesterton said: "The apple which Eve ate in the Garden of Eden was an orange and the peel has been lying about ever since," which, whatever the little bailiff may have thought of it, was an undying truth.

And every time there is a wedding in your street, you may be sure some man has slipped up somehow, when, if you have no curiosity to look into the four-wheeled cab and see why, a petticoat ill-becomes you.

But perhaps down your street, they don't drive to the church in a four-wheeled cab, in which case these observations are entirely wasted upon you.

They were at least the thoughts passing through John's mind when for Jill's sake he determined that witnesses must be secured whom he could trust not to give the secret away.

Chapter XXX: *Selecting a Witness*

IT was well and easy enough to say there must be witnesses who had no business with the life of Fetter Lane; but where were they to be found?

The name of Mr. Bealby, the tailor up the street, was one of the first to present itself for suggestion. John owed him three pounds, fourteen and sevenpence. In respect of that and regarding future custom—for he always signed his letters—*"Soliciting further favors. Yours obediently,"* he might be persuaded to keep the secret. Suddenly then, John remembered he was married.

Now a married man may have the best heart and the finest intentions in the world. He has, moreover, a conscience, but as has been written in respect of him and the application might well be universal: "What is a conscience to a wife?"

It is no good imparting a secret to a married man and putting it to his conscience not to speak of it to another soul. There is his wife to reckon with and though he may tell her nothing, she will manage nevertheless to get it out of him.

"You've got your own ideas of what you ought to do," says she. "I don't want to influence you one way or another. I wouldn't influence you for

the world, but I sha'n't speak to you again if you don't tell me."

Where is the power of conscience to a force like that? Unless it may happen her silence is to be desired, in which case no woman in her senses would make the threat.

John ruled out Mr. Bealby and, failing him, there was not one in Fetter Lane in whom he believed he could trust. Mrs. Morrell, Mrs. Brown, they were not to be considered. Women, both of them and neither of them possessing those essential qualities of ladyship.

But Fate has a way of her own of coming to the assistance of those in trouble.

Coming in from his bedroom one morning to breakfast, he found two letters leaning up against the toast-rack, the one Jill posted to him every night by connivance with the maid at Prince of Wales's Terrace—the other in a writing that seemed familiar. He tried to place it but with no success.

Whatever letters there were, Jill's remained to the last, till that cigarette was lit with the last cup of tea and the day could properly be said to be begun. He opened the other as he sat down and read:

DEAR MR. GREY:

It is not given to anyone to aver that he could not have done better—for if my efforts to rehabilitate myself have as yet been abortive it was not through want of energy but rather through lack of judgment. I have all along, as you know. nurtured within me, if I may so express myself, a spirit of optimism, to buoy myself in a wretched existence all the more embittered by success just without my grasp—like Tantalus, for the want of a few more links.

What Tantalus might have done with a few more links in his pool of water was not easily to be understood. John ran his fingers through his hair, but read on:

Your past kindness and the faith you seemed to repose in me—have I as yet justified? Nevertheless between me—but between him and what the context never divulged—I have good reasons for hoping, if I can but tide over my present embarrassment.

Courage here in this paragraph seemed to have forsaken him. In a moment of trepidation, he shrank behind a full stop and had to begin a fresh paragraph before he could come out again into the open. This time it was the gist of his letter as though further beating about the bush was for cowards but not for him:

If you would send me to Kings Cross Rowton House the sum of two and six, it would greatly help me. This is positively the last time I trouble you. You will be glad to hear I have at last a good violin. I shall be leaving Rowton House as soon as I can get a new set of strings—hence why the 2/6 would be of great help to me.

With kind regards to your father and mother who, though I have never met them, are known to me by your accounts of them.

And wishing you and yours
all health
and prosperity
Believe me
Yours sincerely,
MATTEO ALLIEVI.

If ever Fate had the appearance of playing into a man's hand, it was when the postman brought this letter to John that morning. For who better than this itinerant violinist for a witness who, if

he were in Fetter Lane one day, was in Notting Hill the next and the day after, as likely as not might be in jail, which is a safe place for any gossip.

At a party given in an artist's studio two years before, John had met him. To the accompaniment on a cottage piano, sadly out of tune, he had played Chopin's Preludes from the triple clef on the piano copy. Later on in the evening, with an odor of garlic and in a corner, beneath his breath he had talked to John about his soul. Still later, as they walked home together, he had borrowed half-a-crown.

That was the beginning of a long acquaintance, punctuated with the loans of that invariable sum of money. It was never more. It was never less.

After each loan, a period of time would elapse—a kind of healing interval—when he calculated the sore of parting with that half-a-crown would gradually have closed up and the scar it left be practically forgotten.

During those intervals, Matteo Allievi would be swallowed up in the affairs of a big world. After each of the first few of these occasions, John thought he had seen the last of him. But when two months or so had gone by, back he would come again, sometimes as now in the form of a letter; at others in person himself.

When it was that he returned in person, the half-a-crown last lent would never be mentioned nor, for two days at least, was word uttered of the half-crown to come.

For two whole days, he was the most enlivening of companions, wanting nothing in the world so much as to talk about his own soul. And it was such an odd soul, with such queer moralities attached to it —like a woman with a chatelaine of trumpery trinkets—that John was vastly entertained in listening to him.

But after those first two days of his constant companionship, Matteo's manner of overwhelming self-confidence would resolve itself into one of intermittent awkwardness and much pre-occupation. He seemed always to be awaiting an opportunity which, when once John recognized the symptoms, was conspicuously slow to arise. It amounted to something in the nature of a game to John to see how long he would ward off the inevitable allusion to that half-crown.

Once he succeeded for a full twenty-four hours, when the exasperated violinist was so driven to it that he burst into tears. It needs a man with a chatelaine of moralities attached to his soul, to speak of half-a-crown in the same breath with salvation and the only manner in which this can be done is with a flood of tears to the eyes.

He always secured his half-crown in the end—always secured it, that is to say, when half-a-crown was to be had. When there was not so much as twopence in John's pocket Allievi's expression of incredulity, mingled with the most tragic concern, was so comical that John was reduced to a convulsion of laughter in the midst of his own poverty.

It was so palpable how Matteo regarded the

matter. There were two good days wasted. They might have been better employed. For John was not the only one in the world from whom a periodic visit yielded this invariable sum of money. There were a whole number of them, a regular clientele it had no doubt taken years of careful labor to establish. Sufficient, John strongly suspected, to provide five shillings a week and all the year round.

This writing of a letter was generally to make up for lost time when he had drawn a blank. While he received one by post, he could be prospecting in person at another source.

But this time, John determined Matteo should earn his half-crown. For here, at least, was one who would prove a secret and reliable witness in any registry office. Before even opening Jill's letter, he sat down and wrote to Rowton House, Kings Cross, asking Matteo Allievi to come and see him.

"Come and see me as soon as you receive this," he wrote. "I want to discuss a little matter," which, when you consider there was no enclosure of half-a-crown, was enough to bring any man of fertile imagination from the remotest Rowton House in the Metropolis.

This was one witness as good as secured. Then, by the time he had read Jill's letter and finished his last cup of tea, Fate flung him another, and what is more without one penny charge for her services.

It was Friday and the clarionet Player down the street struck up with "Sally in our Alley."

John leapt to his feet.

There is a quality of inspiration and impulse which cannot be explained. You have it, or you have it not.

Who, without inspiration, spurred by impulse, would have thought of a pauper from Rowton House and a ballad-monger out of the streets, as witnesses for the most solemn undertaking to which a man can attach his signature?

Common sense and the propriety of reason, there is but small doubt of it, come between us and half the things in this world. We sacrifice happiness to get on in life, because it is superlatively unreasonable not to get on if one can; whereas to continue in a state of happiness would often necessitate our flinging expediency to the winds.

There is more than one man or woman in the world who would put off their wedding because Lord Tom Noddy was unavoidably prevented from being best man at the ceremony.

It is the cry of most of us to improve our positions, but seldom ourselves. Public opinion stands sentry at the gates of expediency, crying: "Halt! Who goes there?" "Friend," we say. "Advance friend and give the countersign," is the reply, whereupon we advance and whisper the words: "I want to get on."

It is best to be whispered, that countersign. During those moments in life—and they are ever-recurrent—when we slip through the gates of expediency, there is no knowing who might be near to hear our secret. So we creep past to where each one in the crowd we see within, appears to be striv-

ing for the good of his own soul and the benefit of the State. It is only when we find a world in chaos that we realize how false that appearance has been.

Thus it is but one, having true sense of the dignity of poverty and more knowledge of the need in his heart than the requirements of his position in the world, who could think of securing a pauper from Rowton House to be witness to his wedding, or hail a ballad-monger from the street to keep him company.

John leapt to his feet. In a moment he had flung open the window and thrown a penny down into the street below.

Chapter XXXI: *A Chapter for Those Who Loiter*

IN a free life, where you breathe the air of liberty as you would take into your lungs the first tingling warmth of a spring breeze, advisability is not one of the considerations.

The need—that is all—the need is the voice in you.

Wherefore, you ask a girl to marry you as you would stop a runaway horse—then and there—because you must. There is no time to debate about it. Think once and you will think twice, and twice-thinking, you will as likely as not lose your best chance of happiness in the world, nor will you ever be the hero you thought you were.

For there is no mistaking a runaway horse when you see him careering down the street. Just one moment there is when you can stop him and the next he is gone. It is no good debating whether it is your job to stop him or that of the policeman standing at the corner of the street.

If you want to feel a little better in your bones than you did two minutes before; if you really want to be that brave fellow so fondly and so often you think you are, it is off the pavement like a flash

you must go and be damned to the chances of a split skull or a broken limb.

And with the girl you want to marry, it is much the same. There is as little mistaking her. She comes down your street and into the vision of your heart with the same mad riot of speed.

It is no good considering whether she will help you to get on in life; whether her people are quite to be desired as relations or what advantages she will bring you with your marriage. You are only certain of the conditions of one life and the emotion you have about her in that wonderful moment is the best of them all. Off you must go then, like a flash and be damned to the chances of a residence in Hyde Park Gate, or an income of four thousand a year.

With such an impulse, John flung open the window; with such an impulse, he hurled his penny down into the street below.

When the clarionet player looked up with his gratitude from its recovery in the gutter, John signaled to him to come up stairs.

Chapter XXXII: *Introducing a Philosopher*

HE came timidly into the room, holding his hat and his clarionet in one hand while he pushed his hair off his forehead with the other.

John closed the door after him. This was the man who had made a fine distinction between the playing of his ballads on his instrument and the ceaseless performance of them in his head. The incessant and endless occupation of the latter was that labor by which he had said he earned his wage.

Common sense at least might be expected of one with so comprehensive a grasp of a fine distinction. John pushed out his best chair and asked him to sit down.

"Look here," said he, "I've got a favor to ask you," and he could see the horny fingers straying over the keys of his instrument, pressing them down in a variety of sequences representing "Sally in our Alley," "Come Lassies and Lads," "The Saucy Arethusa," whichever indeed he happened at the moment to be playing in his mind.

"I'll do anything I can, sir," said he, implying that with nothing more than a clarionet, there is

not much in the world a man can do which is of real service to anyone.

"Well, then, first of all," began John, "have you got a best suit of clothes?"

The question was so unexpected that for the moment his fingers were arrested in their playing on those silent keys. It might almost have been supposed that for that instant John had knocked every tune out of his head.

"I've got a pair of trousers, sir," he replied at last. "I've got a pair of trousers I puts on when my old woman's sewin' a patch in these. I wear 'em Sundays sometimes, with a black coat one o' them lawyer gentlemen gave me to go up into Holborn when I was playing in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

There was an ingenuous modesty about this that would have given pleasure to the severest critic of human nature. He had no false ideas about himself as a performer on the clarionet.

"Do you often get paid like that?" asked John.

"What—with a coat or something like that, sir?"

"No—no—I mean paid to get out of hearing? Paid, when you're in Lincoln's Inn to play in Holborn?"

He leant forward with his elbows on his knees and stared a moment at the carpet. It was plain now that he was having a complete rest.

"Well—I took count once, sir," he said presently, and he spoke rather in the tone of one who would betray the deepest secret of his heart, than as one who would deceive another as to the truth of his nature. "I took count once and I reckoned—over

a time of four weeks it was—I reckoned that not quite half the money I made was from those ladies and gentlemen as had kind hearts and the other, that's the larger amount if you notice, sir, from those as wanted me to move on into the next street. That was over four weeks, sir. And I expect it's much the same all the year round. It's an interestin' little calculation when you come to look at it like that. I've often thought how interestin' it was."

John agreed. It was—intensely interesting. But the calculation was more of the man himself than ever it was of his earnings.

"Doesn't it hurt your feelings at all," John inquired, "when they ask you—bribe you to go into the next street?"

As swiftly as he had thought of the purpose the ballad-monger might serve, so swiftly in this sudden interest of the man, it had gone clean out of his head.

The unexpected presentation of a new point of view in life is like finding a piece of money in the street. Sixpence on the pavement has all the appearance of twenty times its value and a real thought in a man's head would make John dart forward like a street arab to be the first to pick it up.

"Doesn't it hurt your feelings at all?" John repeated.

"Well—no, sir. I can't say that it does. If it really hurt my feelings—as you put it—I fancy I shouldn't take the money. What you might call —pride, sir—that 'ud come between me and the

newest pair of trousers in the world. I shouldn't take 'em. I should just go away."

"But you do take 'em? You take the money, too?"

"Yes—I do, sir."

"Well—why?"

He coughed behind his hand. The man had manners, but by no means was he ostentatious about them. He coughed behind his hand as if out of respect for his surroundings. Having done this, somewhat as one who felt he owed a species of apology for talking about the affairs of the gutter in a room where there was evidence of a sense of taste beyond his comprehension, he proceeded to expound his philosophy.

Chapter XXXIII: *Life's Little Awkwardnesses*

"WELL—it's this way, sir," he began. "Our next-door neighbor down at Walham Green has a parrot. It's a beastly bird that parrot is. It's got a whistle like a train in a fog and a noise in its throat it makes like a sheep with a 'acking cough comin' on lambin' time."

John frowned prodigiously from want of understanding. What in the name of heaven had a parrot got to do with it? But the ballad-monger, sure of his point of view, continued without a sign of perturbation at the sight of John's frown.

"Then I have a sister, livin' down in Coventry," he went on, "and next door to her—I know, because me and the old woman paid her a visit last Christmas—next door to her there's a man what has asthma. He's got it bad that poor chap and, bein' run up one brick thick—the houses I mean like what my sister lives in—you can hear every noise he makes. Some nights it's somethin' chronic, that chap with asthma. You can hear him going on and on till he might throttle for all you care, yet he's a decent enough chap in himself. That's another case. Then there's my wife, sir. She snores —well——"

He looked all round the room for simile. He glanced at the ceiling. He cast his eyes down on the floor. But neither the carpet nor the ceiling were of any use to him; he had to resort to his own powers of imagination.

"It's one of those snores," he continued, "that begins with a little one, if I make my meaning clear. A little one it begins with and after about six o' them it gets louder and longer. You'd think she was going to burst or swallow the bed-clothes when she gets to her top note. Lions roarin' at feedin' time ain't nothin' to it. Then, all of a sudden, when you'd think flesh and blood couldn't do no worse, there's a click in her throat, like a sort of trap door goin' and it all falls through like the demon in the pantomime. For two minutes she's breathin' like a child o' six. Then it begins all over again."

"But what the devil," exclaimed John at last. "What the devil has this got to do with your playing your clarionet in the next street?"

"I'm comin' to that," said the ballad-monger with an assuring confidence in his voice. "I'm comin' to that all right. I've just been tellin' you these things because that's what life seems like in some ways to me. Here we are, all bundled up together—Tom and Mary, Dick and Kate—and it 'ud be a queer thing if we all hit it off without one of us gettin' his hair rubbed up the wrong way. The better off you are of course the better you can afford to avoid them—little awkwardnesses. If you can afford it, you can live in a house built two bricks thick. There

are some as can afford to live semi-detached. There are some—in Park Lane—has their houses standin' by themselves where there ain't any side of them you have to go to get away from the girl next door practising the pianner. There are some in the country—oh, my lor'! The country! No hard pavements! I'd lose six coppers in the grass for every one I'd pick up easy in a London gutter! There are some in the country as have houses with gardens all round 'em! Not another house to be seen, even when the leaves is off the trees!"

"Still?" persisted John.

"I'm comin' to it all right, sir. You'll see my point in a jiffy. I've thought it all out, mind you. We all have somethin' to put up with, the worst and the best of us. There are very few as can avoid all the worries of life, and those as can have to pay for it. I have to put up with that parrot next door. I can't afford to go and live nowhere else. My sister has to put up with the poor chap as has got asthma. There's my wife—well—I couldn't pay her to go into the next street—not even if I could afford it—could I?"

There was a wistful note in his voice as he put the question. You realized what a temptation it would be to him to make the bargain if the money were there in his pocket.

But by this time John had seen his point of view and was walking round and round his room, chuckling as he went.

"So you're one of the little awkwardnesses of life," he chuckled and kept on chuckling as he

thought of first one and then another of these inevitable penances that existed for him in Fetter Lane.

"Well, sir," said the ballad-monger, "that's my way of lookin' at it when they offer me sixpence to go into the next street. I'm as necessary to them as a—as a——"

"Corrective," suggested John.

"If you like to put it that way, sir. Anyhow I'm as necessary to them as I am to the slavey washin' the doorstep who starts hummin' 'Sally in our Alley' to make her work seem lighter."

"And do you ply your trade consciously, purposely as a corrective?" inquired John.

"Not every day, sir, I don't. There's Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I go to places like Fetter Lane where half the street is hummin' as I go along and there's Tuesdays and Thursdays I go where they send the servant out of the hall door and ask me to go clean off and take me noise with me."

"Which is the most lucrative?"

"The most——? I beg your pardon, sir, but I'm nearly deaf in this left ear."

"Which pays the best?"

"Ah—yes—I can hear so much better this side. Tuesdays and Thursdays, sir. It's an odd thing, but that's the truth. People'll pay more to get rid of a nuisance than what they will to get a bit of pleasure out of life."

"Then why don't you have three days of that?"

He shook his head. With a protective movement, he picked up his clarionet.

"I like my Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays," he said.

Now with a man of such kidney, who has this much claim to the true functions of Art that he will prefer to set a whole street humming with his tunes, rather than be well paid to hold his peace and do nothing for a living, the mere whisper of romance is sufficient to engage his sympathy.

When John told him at last of his wedding, he became the most willing conspirator in the world.

"I'll get my wife," said he, "to give that coat a rub with a damp cloth and just run an iron over it. That's what I'll get her to do."

Chapter XXXIV: *A Revelation in Atmosphere*

IT was an invariable custom of John's to go every Monday morning to the British Museum and read in the library. Through all the period of their friendship, Amber had never known him to fail in this habit.

He called it—his library.

"I've got that in my library," he would say to one who had not the remotest idea where he lived. "I'll look it up." And it might have been something contained in a volume of priceless value.

On two or three occasions, forgetting this custom, Amber had called at his rooms in Fetter Lane to find them empty. Invariably, then, she had discovered him in his library, having his books brought to him on trolleys by his library attendants.

There is no need to possess the world. With a little imagination, you can appropriate it all, saving yourself much thereby in the expense of up-keep.

On the Monday morning following her release from Holloway, she came down to Fetter Lane with six pounds four and threepence in an envelope gripped in her hand.

There is no point in inquiring where she got it.

It would be impossible to say. There are pawnshops in the neighborhood of Hogarth Road as well as in that of Fetter Lane. There are artists, needing a model, who are well-enough off to pay a couple of weeks' wages in advance. You need to find them. There is, all the same, a vast superfluity of money in the world lying in idleness.

The climate has a lot to do with it. In a country where you see the sun by the grace of God rather than by the habit of Nature, a rainy day is a tangible reality. In other words, all joy in life comes from the sun and without a sense of joy, the mind instinctively sets itself out to provide for the worst of contingencies. We are a people of the mist and so long as Civilization depends upon the men with many possessions, we shall be the most powerful country in the world, because we are always—"putting a little bit away"—as the song has it—"for a rainy day."

Somewhere out of all that superfluity of wealth, Amber contrived to find her six pounds four and threepence. The envelope she put it in was the first receptacle that came to her hand.

From some place of concealment, she watched John come out on the way to his library. There was a set determination in her mind that he should not be there when she came to pay him back. It occurs to some, no doubt, that in such a case she might have sent her money by post. It had occurred to her. She had put it aside without hesitation. Another purpose came first to be served.

Against every inclination, affronting every im-

pulse, she had refused that night of the dinner at *Le Pauvre Monsieur* to come up to his rooms. Ghosts have their acknowledged habitats. They may choose their dwelling place with a fineness of discretion, but once having chosen them, not the sternest will or the most stoical determination can cause them to be evicted. For years and years they will linger in the places they have selected for their abode and though you may visit those corners of the world in the most prosaic of moods, it will not be long before the ghosts come out of their hiding, laying their cold fingers upon your eyes, sending that shudder through all your body which no tension of the nerves or muscles can restrain.

It is all very well to a stranger, saying: "Just a ghost walking over my grave, that's all." To the stranger it means little more or little less than nothing. But to one who knows, to one with whom those moments of your life were played, of which that ghost is the undying spirit, it is such a confession of weakness as—if you have pride at all—you would not reveal for the ransom of a thousand kings.

It was because she would not waken those ghosts to life in his presence that Amber had refused that night to come to John's rooms.

Yet to a woman, often the touch of those icy fingers upon her eyes is a pain she would willingly bear rather than be numb of the sensations of life. It was so with Amber.

Calling herself a sentimental idiot, indeed all those names and epithets by which you justify your-

self in the performance of a deed which in others would earn your relentless contempt, she had come down to Fetter Lane that morning. When John had passed up the street, she hurried into the side door by Mrs. Meakin's shop. With her heart beating in half-a-dozen places all at once, she ran up the stairs to John's room.

Mrs. Rowse, she knew, would be there. By all calculation, Mrs. Rowse would be in his bedroom now he had gone out. She would be tidying up. And that was precisely what she was doing.

In answer to Amber's knock, she opened the door and stood there calculating the days Amber should have been in prison, when, coming to the conclusion that she had effected her escape, she was in two minds as to what she ought to do.

"How did yer get out, Miss?" she asked.

When it was explained how Mrs. Rowse knew; that it was not, as at first must have appeared, that John had told her—a thought more expressed in a sudden beating of her heart, rather than by a definite suspicion in her mind—Amber proceeded, not without pride, to explain how Mr. Grey had paid the money at the court and come all the way down to Holloway to meet her on her release.

She was proud of it. There was no doubt about that. If Mrs. Rowse knew that she had been sent to prison, she might as well know who had had the chivalry, the generosity, and all the other fine impulses she liked to imagine, to buy her out. She might as well know, too, that Amber could pay the money back, which she could assume was the pur-

pose of her visit. She might, indeed she should, know all the facts of the case which Amber was at liberty to tell her; and if from the information she liked to draw conclusions that Amber had not entirely been thrust upon one side, that she had not absolutely been discarded, well, that was all up to the quality of her intelligence and her ability to perform the arithmetical feat of adding two and two.

"I just want to leave this on his desk," said she, when she had made an end and neatly rounded off the impression so that you would never have guessed it was intended to be given. "I just want to leave this on his desk—can I go in?"

"Certainly, my dear," said Mrs. Rowse, a trifle familiar, as she would have felt with any erstwhile inmate of Holloway; a trifle affectionate, too, because the impression had made its mark.

"Excuse me goin' on with the bedroom, won't yer," Mrs. Rowse added. "I've the brass to clean this mornin' so I've got no time to be chuckin' about."

Willingly Amber let her go and herself walked through the other door into that room where all the ghosts of countless evenings, of nights and mornings and all the happy days lay waiting to touch her eyes with their icy fingers.

She closed the door behind her and stood there, looking at the familiar furniture it seemed she had not seen for a hundred years and yet had left but the day before. There came the shudder through all her body as well she knew there would. But

in her eyes there was no hint of tears. It was not that she would not cry. She could not. The icy fingers do not press tears out of the eyes. It is some mere nerve from the eye to the brain they touch. It is thoughts not tears they disturb; but thoughts in such confusion no mind can sift them out. They lie on the heart with all their accumulated weight and the heart aches—a dull persistent ache—but that is all.

This then, was what she had lost, this warm sense of companionship, this close spirit of understanding, this intimate admission to the very soul of a man which was so definitely contained in the atmosphere held in the space between those four walls.

Was it her fault? There came a sudden revelation to her that it was. She had never reached the center of his heart. All she had done was to make his pulses beat the quicker and had been content with that.

She knew then as she stood there, leaning back against the door and looking round the room, that there must be more in a man's life than his pulses; a deeper emotion than that which rises thickly in his throat, a more profound service than that which ministers to his bodily comfort, even though it may be with the faithfulness and servitude of a slave.

That was what she had given him—servitude—and so freely given had it been, that she had never appreciated it was no more.

She realized then as she looked about the room with its mixture of physical austerity and mental

comfort, that it is only when a man is finished with life, when the sap of impulse in him has run dry, that he asks for servitude and, getting it, is well content. But till that sap is dry, belief is a greater gift than service and she had never given him that. She had treated him just as an ordinary man in the ordinary traffic of life; been ready to leave him if the need called her, been ready to let him go if the cry had come to him. And all the time—willing as he had been to take her servitude—it was the greater thing he wanted out of Life and only the less had she proffered.

Some men, perhaps, could make the best out of themselves, standing alone and needing the help of no one. He was not one of these. He was one of the children that never came to man's estate; one of those children who walk, staring at the stars and, not watching their feet, stumble so often and fall into the mud.

Seeing his room after these months of absence, not for the ghosts it contained, but in the spirit it betrayed, she knew then what she had failed to give him; what, stumbling on through his life, he suddenly had come upon in Jill.

Without ever having seen Jill, herself, Amber's imagination projected a vision of her out of the atmosphere of that room. Seeing how gifted women are in these occult practices, the vision was strangely at fault.

She saw a girl with a beauty of her own. To a woman this means perhaps the most dangerous beauty of all. And so far as that went, the vision

was sure enough. But it was the type of mind she saw, beyond that personality of appearance in which, had she known it, or John known it, she had so far gone astray.

For what she saw was a mind tuned to the measure of truth and lit with the soft, clear light of beauty. A mind, she saw, that would thrill to all the inspirations of his own; a mind, receptive of his thoughts before he so much as uttered them; receptive of those thoughts which never reached the communicating function of his brain.

What indeed she saw—for no picture that comes in these moments of vision is without its truth—was a sudden revelation of John's own mind as it was contained in the atmosphere of that room. Her fault had only been that she thought it was Jill, and, with that thought, it seemed she knew so surely then why she had had to go.

Never in her life would she be able to give him that quality of mind. It was not hers and trying to give—as indeed she might well have the will—would prove so dismal a failure as to be too pitiable to think about.

So she stood, all those moments, with her back to the door, looking about her and it was not John she blamed; nor could she blame herself. There came a wonder upon her, that was all, a wonder why life throws people together with such apparent poverty of discrimination.

Why had she ever met him? Why he, her? Who was the gainer—who was the loser? And above all, in an amazing magnanimity of heart, the

wonder if now he had met the right woman, no less than a tender hope that he had.

With the arrival of her mind at that thought, she said out loud, as was her invariable habit to think when she was alone: "Bless his funny old face," which must be supposed to have conveyed more to her than it looks in the chill of print—and she moved over to the desk with her six pounds four and threepence.

This she laid down in its envelope, conspicuously on his blotter and was about to turn away when her eye caught the manuscript—a sheet of paper no more—of a poem he had been writing.

Possibly she was not within her right. But it was his. One day it would appear in print. One day anyone might read it. Why not she, then? She picked it up:

Parting is nought—
The quick sharp wrench of hands apart,
The swift, last look of aching eyes
The broken breath, the tears that start,
The dumb wonder and the mute surprise
That neither will, nor love, nor God have power
To add one moment to the parting hour.

Parting is nought—
Each winter's filled with parting things.
The leaves that from the elm tree falls,
The chaffinch and her mate that no more sings,
The spread of Death that settles over all,
All this is parting—but Life comes again
With just the fingers touch of April rain.

Parting is nought—
But O the long, sad hours that draw

Their weary feet down paths of endless days;
Knowing there is no meeting ever more,
No April rain, no song of Springtime praise.
Here is a pain that quivers at a touch
God gives to those who've loved not little but too much.

Why had he written that? There was a swell of something in her throat and then a pulse of something in her heart. Why had he written that? It was the cry of a mind in deepest pain, yet there he was on the very eve almost of his marriage. Why had he written that:

No April rain—no song of Springtime praise.

She felt a hope and a breaking in her heart at the same moment.

An instant later, she was swiftly putting it back as it lay on the blotter. There came the sound of footsteps up his uncarpeted flight of stairs. They approached the door. The handle was turned. The door opened.

She looked round. There was John standing in the entrance.

Chapter XXXV: *Being a Millionaire*

THE movement of both of them was arrested in some ridiculous way as though a photographer with his camera had suddenly put up his hand, saying: "Now! Like that! Just one moment, please!"

Then, not only because of its ridiculousness, not merely because something was throbbing in her heart, but as much because she would hide from him the ghosts that would not leave her, Amber laughed, a full, round laugh. It was like taking the drapery of a generous cloak and wrapping its folds about them while she caught them to her body close.

"Of course, you *would* come back," said she, at the edge of her laughter. "I thought you'd safely got away when I saw you go up the street. But I've never known you do anything one expected you to."

John relaxed from the photographic attitude, and came into the room, closing the door behind him.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he asked.

She made a bold front of it, confessing to being caught out, with the faint suggestion that she knew she had probably offended him.

"This," said she and, just picking up the envelope,

she threw it down again on the desk where the chink of the money it contained told him plainer than words what she had been up to.

If he was mighty glad to get that money back, even she, with all her instincts about him, would not have guessed it.

He looked for one instant as though, however much by accident it might have been, she had thrown it back in his face. The next moment he was disclaiming all need of it.

"Do you think I've forgotten how hard it would be for you to get hold of as much as that?" said he. "Go on, you take every penny of it back, and pay it if you like in instalments, a pound a month, something like that till it's all paid off."

He strode across the room and picked up the envelope. The feel of that money it contained was tantalizing. With such a sum he had intended to buy Jill her engagement ring. Without it——

What is the good of pretending that he had all the high qualities of a hero; that he was hurt at her returning it and nothing more? What is the good of suggesting that he wanted her to keep it more than he needed it himself; that he had no thought of the benefits it would mean to him? Not a ha'p'orth of good in the world! He was no hero. He wanted it damnably.

It was not, however, because she guessed that, that she fought for it to stay where it was. He thrust it finally in her hand. With no less finality she pitched it away into a corner of the room.

"If you give it to me again," she said, "I'll take

it outside and I'll fling it through the window and smash the window pane."

There comes a point in an argument of this nature when one can persuade oneself with conviction that surrender is all that remains. With an honest reluctance, mingled with a no less genuine sense of satisfaction, John picked up the envelope from the floor and put it in his pocket.

"Now tell me what you're going to do with it!" said she.

When he admitted he was going to buy Jill's engagement ring with it, she knew, as she had known before in her bones, that she had been right.

With a sudden affectionate gesture, that was a genuine impulse, she caught hold of his arm telling him to go out and buy it then and there and, what is more, insisted that she was coming with him.

There was a game, which in the past days John had sometimes played with her. It is the cheapest game in the world, though it deals with hundreds of pounds and may at times run into thousands. If you play it in Bond Street, it can be in thousands before you know where you are.

The purpose which brought them out that morning, suggested the game to John without even so much as a word passing between them. They were standing outside the window of Boissard Frères, gazing at pearl necklaces and diamond pendants in the same sort of awe with which a guttersnipe looks through the window at a mountain of sweets marked four ounces a penny.

Suddenly John took her arm and before she knew

where she was, Amber was being led into that spacious apartment where there are two or three occasional tables standing upon expensive Persian rugs, but nothing to suggest that anybody ever did any business on the premises. There was none of that disgusting atmosphere of buying and selling in the place. If you happened to come across any such things as the contents of the window outside suggested you might, it would be invariably by accident. If you paid for it, then it would be an insult on your part and if they accepted it, then, a generous oversight on theirs. It was an atmosphere where anything might happen but where you would always be bodily at your ease.

The moment John said he wanted to see some diamond and emerald rings, Amber recognized that game. It is called—being a millionaire.

All sorts of people play it—even millionaires. But when a millionaire plays it, he calls it by a different name. He calls it—being a pauper. The only distinction between the two is that when playing—being a pauper—you finish the game differently. Voluntarily, you give the secret away. You don't want them to think you a pauper all the time. Playing—being a millionaire—the difficult part of it is not to let the secret give itself away. Being a millionaire is much the better game of the two, because it's such a tremendous joke if you win. It gives you all sorts of feelings of satisfaction and omnipotence. You walk out of the shop as though you had made a bid for the theater in Drury Lane. Whereas, in being a pauper, the thing is to lose and

if you can't lose, it makes you damnably cross that people don't recognize you for what you really are.

That morning, in the premises of Boissard Frères, John was playing the first game. He walked into the shop as though he knew well enough where these society jewelers keep the things they sell, and he looked about him.

A gentleman seated at a table at the end of the room—a gentleman beautifully dressed, with patent leather boots glistening under the table—looked up as John entered. In a single instant, with the practiced eye of one who has been playing the game all his life, he summed the matter up and made his first move. He called to a young attendant who at once appeared. He directed him in French to inquire what John wanted.

These were the first two moves. John had entered the shop with a splendid and casual indifference. The manager had taken stock of him and met the maneuver by summoning a young assistant.

So far the Boissard Frères were winning easily.

The young attendant approached John. He was just as wonderfully dressed as the manager, far better dressed than John had ever been in his life, but he was a young man. The meaning conveyed by the manager in this need not be commented upon. It was a distinct score.

"What can I do for you?" asked the young assistant and in that tone of voice which subtly suggested that, with the promotion for which he hoped, he would one day be in a position to leave these transactions to others.

John spent a little time lighting a cigarette and then asked to see some diamond and emerald rings.

"About what price?'" asked the young man.

This is a common catch move in the game, like the fool's mate and other obvious gambits. No one who knows how to play is ever taken in by it.

"Well—I wanted to see some rings," said John. "I wasn't thinking so much about the price. If I see anything I like we can begin to talk about the price. Don't sell it to me before I've seen it. I don't ask more than that."

From the manner in which the young man turned away to do as he was bid, the manager saw that Boissard Frères had had a set back. He consulted in an undertone with the young man and indicated a drawer half-concealed in the decoration of the room.

John turned and looked out of the glass door into Bond Street and Amber squeezed his arm.

"I hope I'm not going to laugh," said she.

Most firmly he enjoined her not to. When playing this as a four-cornered game—as in this instance of John and Amber against the manager and the assistant—it is one of the foremost rules that your partner does not laugh.

In a few moments the young man returned with a box containing the kind of ring mentioned by John, but of obviously an inferior class to the specimens they had seen in the window.

John looked at them dubiously, so dubiously that at last the young man picked up the best in the case and held it out so that it caught the light.

"This is a very nice ring," said he; "ninety-five pounds," and his eyes were sharp on John's face. John never moved a muscle. He never even looked at the ring. His eye wandered casually over the case and he said:

"You can show me better than these—can't you?"

"Certainly, sir," said the young man and took the case away. John looked at Amber with a solemn face and slowly shut one eye.

The next case contained six rings. John picked up the biggest of them. Size is a fair criterion in these matters.

"What's the price of this?" he asked and, taking Amber's hand, he held it out and put the ring on her finger, regarding it critically.

"Three hundred and eighty-five pounds, that one, sir."

John screwed up his face, then looked up at Amber.

"What do you think about it?" he asked.

And Amber, who but a few days before had been in Holloway Prison for a debt of six pounds, five and threepence, said that of course it was very nice, but that there was something in the color of the emerald she somehow did not like.

The young man was inclined to be courteously amused by this criticism and might easily, had he been a first-class player, have scored heavily by taking advantage of the general ignorance of the public.

He lost his chance, utterly, when he said without absolute conviction that he doubted whether a

better colored stone could be found in London or Paris.

"Do you mean to say," interposed John, "that you haven't got a stone of a better color than that yourselves—here—in the shop?"

The young man put the ring back in the case and went again to the manager. After a moment's muttered conversation, the manager rose from his table and approached them. This is a moment as when in Chess, you suddenly move your Queen out of a crowd of pieces in a far corner and, sailing down the whole length of the board, you say: "Check."

It is a moment as thrilling as that. It is a moment also when it is quite possible for you not to have noticed that you are placing her in direct vulnerability to your opponent's knight.

"You want a better emerald, sir," said the manager, "than the ones you have already seen?"

"I want the best stone I can get," replied John, which was so undeniably true that he could say it with the utmost conviction.

The manager unlocked a drawer and brought out a small case, opening it in the light and displaying a wonderful emerald, green as the depths of the Atlantic.

"We could set this for you," said he, "as you wished. We would submit designs."

John took the box in his hand. It was so wonderful a stone as for a moment to keep them both serious. At last he looked up.

"What is the price of this?" he inquired.

"Four hundred and fifty pounds—unset—as it is."

Now this is the most difficult moment of all in the game. Either, it seems, you must buy the thing —which is ridiculous—or you must refuse it, in which case all your splendid play which has carried you thus far, goes dead against you.

John handed back the box and looked straight into the manager's eye.

"Of course, I'm not an expert on these things," said he, "but tell me candidly. What's the matter with it?"

"What's the matter with it?" repeated the manager. "There's nothing the matter with it."

John smiled.

"Oh, nonsense," said he. "A stone like that is worth more than four hundred and fifty pounds. I know that much. Yours isn't the first shop I've been into. Of course, as I say, I'm not an expert. I can't see what it is. To me it looks perfect. But I know this much that if it were really perfect, you could get and would ask more than that for it."

The manager laughed awkwardly.

"You can pay more, sir, if you like," said he, "but it won't make the stone more perfect than it is."

John buttoned up his coat.

"Well—I'm sorry," said he genially, as though he were sorry as much for the manager as anything else. "You've rather destroyed my confidence in it. I liked it immensely—immensely—didn't you, my dear?" He turned his head towards Amber, but

dared not look at her and not daring to look at him, she replied that she did, too.

"But it's no good buying anything that you're not absolutely sure about. After all, four hundred and fifty pounds is a sum of money. I'm not so well off that I can afford to disregard it. I'm very sorry. It's only that—well—as I said—you've destroyed my confidence. I'm sorry to have given you all this trouble. I'm much obliged to you. Good morning."

There's no doubt about it, it's a first-class game.

Chapter XXXVI: *A Fitting for a Ring*

ULTIMATELY the ring was bought in Holborn and cost six pounds, ten.

The question of whether it was large or small enough was settled, uninvited, by Amber, who held out the third finger of her left hand.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said the jeweler, "I didn't understand it was intended for you," and the smile on his face can be described no better than by one word—smirk—of which I am sure no self-respecting dictionary would ever give a definition.

There was one instant when both of them could have denied it. With John it passed the more swiftly of the two. If it hurt her feelings would he not be a cad, since the fact was not altered by the jeweler's mistake.

With Amber, that instant lingered. For the moment she could not make up her mind. What would he think if she did not deny it? Did it matter? They both knew it was not true. A spirit of mischief then—a spirit that comes to those with a sense of humor when the heart cannot be more hurt than it is—lifted with a laugh into her eyes. There was something just comical, just in accordance with all the odd ways and situations of John' life that

she should be standing there being fitted for Jill's engagement ring.

And lastly, before the instant quite had gone, there was the bitter satisfaction of being engaged to him even for five minutes, even in the eyes of a twopenny ha'penny little jeweler in High Holborn.

He tried the ring on her finger and she never said a word.

It was too small. It would have been too small for anyone. Arrangements were made that it should be enlarged and sent to Fetter Lane as soon as it was ready.

Leaving a deposit, as is customary in these shops where you do nothing but business and playing at being a millionaire would be a waste of time, and they came out again into the street.

She was far more in a state of wonderment at his silence than at her own. Her own, frankly, she had not attempted to understand. Not one of those thoughts, definitely recorded, had passed into the conscious function of her mind.

But he must have known why he had said nothing, why he had not offered to drive the smirk off the jeweler's face with a simple explanation.

In a timid fashion, she laid a hand on his arm.

"Why didn't you say it was not for me?" she asked.

He looked round at her, smiling.

"You dear old thing," said he, "what did it matter? A stuffy little jeweler. It doesn't matter what he thinks, does it?"

And that was punishment enough for her mis-

chief. Obviously he had kept silent in order not to hurt her feelings. He could think of and for her and let a little mistake like that go by.

Why?

Because he was so deeply in love that nothing but the great things mattered. He was so deeply in love as that his heart had grown big enough to hold a tender thought of her.

It was this she knew she could never bring him. In all the years they had been together, she had never succeeded in stirring him like this. He had turned from her to the sound of a clarion call. He had turned to make his life and his work out of love and before him lay paths of gold—as he had read to her in Browning—and the need of a world of men—for her.

They had lived in the light and the darkness together. Now it was morning and the sun had beckoned him from over the mountain's rim.

Chapter XXXVII: *Prelude to a Rehearsal*

ONCE having bought the engagement ring it seemed to John affairs were going at such a pace as that nothing short of an earthquake or the sound of trumpets announcing the last day could stop them.

He put it on his mantlepiece in its leather jewel box where Mrs. Rowse could well observe it. The very next morning while dusting, it came under her eye. Out of the corner of his own, he saw her quick glance of suspicion. It is in the natural order of things that a woman should be suspicious about a jeweler's box, purporting to hold a ring. Jeweler's shops would have to put up their shutters and men could be sure of a balance at the bank if it were not so.

But in Mrs. Rowse's suspicions there was more than a woman's mere instinct for finery that is beyond her means. Her mind flew at once—as he guessed it would—to John's pertinent questions about marriage in a hurry. She performed in her mind that mathematical calculation in which women are as accurate as machines. She put two and two together, and was by no means surprised to find how palpably they made four.

"Do you want me to leave this 'ere, sir?" she asked.

John said he saw no purpose in removing it.

"Valuable ring like that, sir," said Mrs. Rowse, seeing through the lid of the leather box as though it were made of glass, "might easy get knocked into the fire."

"Not if you're careful, Mrs. Rowse. Besides it won't be there for long. It'll be gone this morning."

Mrs. Rowse dusted it and laid it down as though it were a baby she was putting to sleep when, seeing that she had placed it with the hinges facing outwards, she carefully turned it round.

"I expect that cost a lot of money, sir," said she.

"What makes you think that, Mrs. Rowse?"

"Well, sir, ladies like expensive things now-a-days, don't they? What I mean, they don't seem to be satisfied with what they used to be. The only bit of jewelry my mother 'ad was a Scotch pebble in a brooch. Now my Lizzie when she got married would 'ave 'er diamonds. They weren't real of course—not what they call water diamonds, but those paste jewels shine like winking if you look at 'em right."

John rose from his chair. She deserved her reward. What is more he had been longing to show it to her from the very first. And when she saw Jill's engagement ring, she breathed so deep a sigh that John shut the box and hurried into his bedroom in apprehension of all questions that might follow.

It was getting so very close to the wedding. For though this was only the stage of the engagement ring, yet in their schedule of affairs, events were to crowd one upon another in the swiftest succession.

That morning Jill was to meet at lunch the two witnesses to the ceremony. It seemed necessary to John they should be broken into some sort of acquaintance first before the actual meeting in the Registry Office. It made things easier. You cannot properly worry about introductions when you are about to step across the threshold into the magic of life. None too confident about her reception of them, John had decided she should meet them first in the midst of the ordinary amenities of a work-a-day world.

It would, moreover, be a rehearsal for them. He wanted them to appear in their best light and without actual experience he was none too certain what sort of a light that was going to be. It might appear like the light of a farthing dip stuck in the neck of a beer bottle.

That day then, at lunch, was to be the experiment of their rehearsal. He went into his bedroom when he heard Mrs. Rowse's sigh—he went into his bedroom to change his clothes for the occasion.

Chapter XXXVIII: *Costumes for the Part*

THROUGHOUT life there is always the instinct, and as often as not in the very best of us, to dress the part.

A soldier puts on a red coat and struts up and down, giving the impression that war is a bloody business. Undoubtedly he is right. A priest arrays himself in an apparently seamless garment of a pattern such as they are supposed to have worn in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago and if by any chance there were a conspicuous slit in the back of it, I doubt whether he would be able to perform in true spirit the service of the Church.

To stitch a broad arrow on to his coat would give to any man the features of a criminal and again I question whether a man with a coat so stitched could walk through the streets without avoiding a sense of shame, let him be the most honest fellow in the world.

Without these costumes, and were Necessity neither the mother of Invention nor the mistress of the wardrobe, life would have all that strenuous reality, that exhausting earnestness which some would endeavor to convince us is its purpose. As it is, there is a certain, jolly, play-acting quality about it all, failing which, we should know men and

women just for what they are, instead of what a humorous assortment of clothes can make of them.

One can conceive nothing more terrible than knowing one's priest for what he is; for what he is may well be the last thing he meant to be. You can tell what he means to be, however, by what he wears and the intentional purpose of life is far more noble a thing than its common reality.

So you go on believing in a world where belief is always better than knowledge. For knowledge sets out on a journey with a compass and a whole chart of arithmetical calculations while belief makes its way under the beacon light of the stars of God.

Chapter XXXIX: *The Wardrobe*

TO dress up then and play the part is all a condition of the quality of belief. When that morning John looked into his wardrobe to find that the best costume he had would make him look something like an Italian waiter, that in fact there was no other garment in which he could properly play the part of a lover about to drink his mistress' health, he felt as unhappy as the priest in the vestry who discovers a shameful tear in his surplice.

I care little who chooses to say this is not a tragic moment. You can tell me there are men who don't mind what they wear. There is but one answer to that. That is their rôle; and it takes a man as long to make up for it as if he were pulling on silken tights and offering himself to the world as an Elizabethan Cavalier.

It was a tragic moment for John when he had to put on a gray flannel suit and set out to Wrigglesworth's to meet his witnesses. There would be a moment in their repast when he would hold up his glass and drink the health of Jill and he felt he could have done it so much better in that tail coat he once possessed in which he looked like a dentist

but felt like the proprietor of half the theaters in London, or a politician earning four hundred a year.

But if John, as the principal actor, was not dressed as correctly for the performance as Necessity, the mistress of the wardrobe, might have wished, Matteo Allievi and Charles Henry Quirk could scarcely have come more into the picture than if they had been made up by a theatrical costumer.

Play-acting, indeed, was the whole existence of Matteo Allievi. He had learnt early in life that you can only borrow half-crowns with sustained success when you have all the appearance of being able to pay them back again. He may have had wrong ideas of what was really convincing in that appearance, but it was the earnest intention of his soul to pay them back. And our intentions are the model for the character of which we dress the part.

The costume for this occasion, as he conceived it, consisted of a pair of check trousers. A check is always fashionable, so long as it is not large enough to play parlor games upon. A check tricks the eye. You cannot see the shine of wear on it. A check is a gentleman's pattern. It contrives to make a gentleman of you, when it does not insist upon your being twice the cad that you are.

Allievi's trousers were check.

His coat and waistcoat were black. There was the weak spot of conviction in the *tout ensemble*. Black goes green. You may never have had it long enough to know this about it, but it does. And long before this the nap has worn off, the elbows

shine and there is a suspicious glitter around the edges of the cuff.

Very probably you are one of those who puts away his coat on a hanger, has two pairs of trousers to every suit and keeps them in a press, in which case these remarks about clothes will have all the appearance of exaggeration and you will not even be stirred to interest when you hear there is a remedy for these conditions of wear. But there is. None of the tailors in little streets—tailors like Mr. Bealby—will tell you what it is lest you kept your black coat two years longer than ever it was your wont to do. These tailors are quite firm about this. You might burn them at the stake before they would give the secret away.

The secret is—blacking.

Just ordinary blacking will work wonders on a black coat that is worn at the elbows and is beginning to grow pallid in places with that tinge of green. Allievi had discovered this secret many years before.

"I have the secret, my boy," he had often said to John whenever he put out his leg and looked down the sharp line of his trousers, "I have the secret of always being immaculate."

But he never told what the secret was.

The mere use of that word—immaculate—gave you the impression he knew how to dress, though, as a matter of fact, he had borrowed it from the vocabulary of his Church and not from any tailor's advertisement.

Standing in front of his glass one morning, he

had been reading the Mass from his prayer book, because a little appointment of business had made it inconvenient for him to attend the service in church.

He had found that it was quite an impressive ceremony even in an attic bedroom. The sound of his voice, intoning the words, seemed full of real religion to him. Then, as he read out the words —the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary— he had looked up and caught sight of his reflection in the mirror on the deal chest of drawers. At that, he stopped in the midst of his Mass, but in a voice which still might have led the choir of St. Peter's, he said aloud:

"That's what I am—immaculate."

And it was largely due to boot-blacking.

The only disadvantage about it was that he could not come too near to anyone. He was apt to leave his mark.

Yet even that aloofness had its compensation. You always received the impression from Allievi's attitude in conversation that he was a man who kept himself to himself. That alone was no little help in borrowing half-a-crown. There was a dignity about it, making more pitiable the circumstances which had driven him to that predicament.

So you have an indistinct picture of Matteo Allievi as he appeared that morning outside Wrigglesworth's in his black coat and waistcoat, his check trousers, a very low collar, a bright green tie, a red handkerchief just idly appearing out of the tail pocket of his coat and a pair of brown boots that

were the most priceless possession in his wardrobe. These were quite new. He had stolen them. That is to say, he had taken them out of a shop when no one was looking and, seeing it was the shopman's duty to keep an eye on all his goods, Allievi felt he was not entirely to be blamed.

Frankly he had told John all about it.

"*L'opportunité fait le larron,*" said he, and in English had added with an unimpeachable sense of inward conviction. "But if I were God, I should blame the man who made the opportunity. There was no necessity for him to leave the shop unprotected, and it's beyond doubt, I badly wanted a pair of boots."

It was beyond all doubt he wore them with a black tail coat and pair of check trousers.

Charles Henry Quirk was very different from this. He had not the Italian's vigor of style about him. The black coat which the lawyer's man had given him in Lincoln's Inn as an inducement to go up into Holborn, made you suspect it was as much the garment he wanted to see the last of, as of Mr. Quirk and his clarionet. Rubbing a damp cloth over it and pressing it with a hot iron had made its outlines more definite and angular. You knew it was a coat. But you were just as conscious that it did not fit.

His bowler hat seemed somehow wrong with the frock coat. His trousers were frayed at the bottoms though you would have had to be sharp to notice it, for Mrs. Quirk had trimmed them to the quick. Yet notwithstanding that his boots gave

up all hope of competition with that stolen property of Allievi's, John nevertheless preferred his appearance of the two.

Allievi had overdressed the part. His garments cried out in different places that there was a wedding in the air. The voice of them came to a top note with the gardenia in his button hole. He was better than a best man.

When John introduced them to each other, the one as Matteo Allievi, the violinist, the other as Charles Henry Quirk, the clarionet player, they each accepted the best possible view of the situation.

Looking at those splendid check trousers, the bright yellow brown boots, the red silk handkerchief lolling out of the tail coat pocket and that white gardenia with only one petal missing, Charles Henry Quirk said to himself:

"Well-dressed—got money—but can't be much of a violinist."

And Matteo Allievi, knowing well the look of frayed trousers however cunningly trimmed; calculating to the incident, the circumstances under which such a frock coat is acquired and regarding with pity the thinness of the soles of those black boots, he said to himself:

"Poor as a church mouse—disgustingly poor—but probably an excellent clarionet player."

It is always up to yourself in this world to take the best point of view. Pessimism is not merely a disease of the liver. It is a pathological condition of the soul. In any case it is no fit guest at a wedding, or any party at all for the matter of that.

There is no doubt the two of them were well pleased with each other's acquaintance and when Allievi began a story of how once he refused the hand of an Italian countess in marriage, Charles Henry Quirk listened with parted lips and approving nods of his head.

Chapter XL: *The Dress Rehearsal*

"SHE was what you might say—beastly—with money," declared Allievi. "Rolling in it."

He rolled his eyes as he said it, to give some idea of the disgraceful state to which money had reduced her.

With his eyes constantly searching down the street for sight of Jill, John asked in an absent-minded way how old she was.

Allievi conveyed into a shrug of his shoulders all that which he could not put into the limitations of his speech.

"I was teaching her daughter the violin," said he. "Ah! But there was genius! She had learnt nearly all I could give her. But when the contessa fell in love with me—what could I do? I am not a man with the cold blood. I burn!"

He closed his eyes to convince them what pains he could suffer in silence under the influence of passionate despair. But this situation apparently had been unable to be borne. He had loved the daughter—a beautiful girl of twenty-eight.

"But for that," said he, "I might now have been driving in my carriage."

"But not your carriage *really*," Mr. Quirk suggested with his own passion for exactitude. "Not *your* carriage. *Hers.*"

Allievi seized his hand. Here was an appreciative soul, who, if indeed he were an excellent performer on the clarionet, no doubt, at times had a spare half-crown about him.

"You read character!" he exclaimed, "and so quick! It was just that. Nothing else! Her carriage—her money—everything would be hers! Why should I borrow what I could never pay back?"

He shuddered at the thought of it.

And all the time during the narration of Allievi's romance, John's apprehensions were increasing in force in his mind. This meeting it seemed—this ratification of the witnesses—would be a final test of her courage to go through with it all to the end. If she accepted Matteo Allievi and Charles Henry Quirk as signatories to the greatest event in her life, then, it seemed to John, there was little left to fear. It had come in his mind to be an ordeal, if not by battle, at least by a lunch at Wrigglesworth's, and now, every moment, the fear was coming to him that she was not even going to make her appearance in the lists.

There was always the danger, of course, that at the last moment her secret had been discovered and that they would not let her go. But the danger he feared most, without realizing how deep that fear had gone, was that she herself had changed her mind.

He would never have blamed her. For much as it appeared she understood, much as he felt she loved him, there still was some spirit of hallucina-

tion in it all. Without being aware that he had cast the spell of it, without being certainly conscious it existed at all, there was still something of a conjuring trick to him in the whole business. For long whiles together he would sit wondering if it were true.

Now, at any moment, and all his apprehensions were aware of it, he might learn how much of a mirage it was. It was a new world he had come into and as yet had scarce the time to look about him. Now, here, as it were, he was on the crest of a hill from which it was possible to gain some little view of the sort of world it was.

Every skirt that swung round the corner of the street took his heart and shook it till it beat twice over beneath his waistcoat. Now and again he left his companions and hurried to the corner, then hurried back for fear she might by chance have come the other way.

If she did not come, what would he do? He began thinking it out and came to the conclusion that Life was a hazardous adventure after all. In the depths of his pocket, he turned a coin over and over again, then pulled it out and looked at it.

Heads she was coming! Tails she was not! It was heads. Had it been tails, he was in that state of mind to believe. Being heads, he thought what a futile business was this superstitious tossing of a coin.

Then he argued it with Fate, giving himself no unwarranted chances. Was it likely that Fate would bring any man all the way in hope to that

very moment only to disappoint him at the last? With the view he had gained from his high crest, it seemed the most likely thing in the world. Then why in the name of heaven should he be picked out to be the sport of it?

A suspicion that suffering and disappointment are the bitter certainties of life, crept into the argument. He knew then she was not coming. This thought had been sent him to help him bear the blow of it. She was not coming. He looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes after the hour. The whole sensation of his being rose, swelling in a thickness in his throat. He turned away from the two men, still calmly talking about their insignificant affairs, at his side.

She was not coming. Why should she come, indeed, to a penniless poor devil like him? And why in the name of heaven had he ever been fool enough to think that she would or could.

A hansom whirled round the corner of the street. At the sight of its occupant, involuntarily he seized Allievi by the arm and laughed.

Chapter XLI: *Lunch at Wrigglesworth's*

AFTER these first trying moments of introduction, when Matteo bowed so elaborately as to fling one back into the period of the Cavaliers and Charles Henry was obviously so ill-at-ease as to take off his hat and shake Jill's hand with the hand that gripped it, the affair began to turn the corner of appearances and held out all the promise of success.

"Matteo Allievi, the violinist——"

Well, the name and the occupation might be said to justify that elaborate bow. For it was not merely—a violinist—but—the violinist—and once you have said of a man that he is—*the* anything—so long as it is not a trade—you provide an allowance for his wildest eccentricities.

At the first moment of meeting, when the appearance of the two witnesses had forced itself upon her, John had seen a wavering look of doubt in Jill's eyes. With the exception of Mr. Chesterton, whom she had found entertaining, if not quite so clever as his books, these were the first of John's friends she had met. Having engaged them as witnesses to the most solemn ceremony in their lives, she assumed they were friends and had not thought

of confirming the assumption. And they were odd-looking friends. She knew what her father would have said of them.

Swiftly on the detection of that puzzled look in her eyes, John had affected his introductions.

"Matteo Allievi—the violinist——"

Jill bowed solemnly to that grandiloquent sweep of the hat and the self-effacement of the bending figure of Allievi. Serious and concerned as he was about it all, John had to distend his nostrils to keep from laughter.

"Charles Henry Quirk—the clarionetist."

After violinist, clarionet-player sounded beer of small parts. Of the two, John would sooner have given Charles Henry the best advantages of introduction. Allievi could well look after himself. But Charles Henry was shy—pitiably so. His hands were trembling. By the servant of such a lady as this, he had often been sent with a shilling into the next street. He had probably seen her opening the window, as he went, to let in the peace and silence he left behind him. He was abominably nervous, wherefore John gave him—clarionetist—at a venture, pretty well convinced that none of them would know whether he was right or wrong. Certainly he did not know himself and relied upon the forgiveness of any real musician who might have heard him.

Immediately following these introductions came a warmer sense of security. The puzzled look went out of Jill's eyes. As a violinist, that elaborate bow, almost amounting to a genuflection, was all in

accordance with the facts. So she saw him receiving the plaudits of his audience. John had strange friends—but she knew all artists were strange. She had been to concerts at Queens Hall often enough to discover that musicians were not ordinary people and the more celebrated, the more extraordinary they were. Really, she thought, this was an honor to have a great violinist, witness to her wedding ceremony. Probably he had played before Royalty, which makes everyone elaborate in their gestures or in the disporting of the tie-pin in their tie. If her father or mother could know that John had friends who had received presents at the hands of Royalty, they might not think so discouragingly of her marriage after all.

She located the pin in Allievi's tie—a glittering diamond for which he had paid the complete sum of one of his half-a-crowns—and she felt she was right about Royalty.

Charles Henry was different. She suspected him, as Matteo had done, of being poor. But clarionetist is an inspiring word. In all the awkward shyness of his movements, the constant cough behind the hand, she saw with these eyes of her ready belief, a great musician to whom the more conspicuous success of Allievi had been denied. Instinctively she liked him best. Her heart went out to him because of his failures and because, having no appreciation for the clarionet herself, she assumed his life was a lonely one. She had never met anyone who liked the clarionet, and suspected he had not met many himself, whereas everyone

loved the violin. Why did some men choose the clarionet, the bassoon or the oboe, when there were such instruments as the violin and the 'cello? That thought, with the moment of sympathy for Mr. Quirk hurried in the crowd of impressions across her mind. John would tell her. She left it in confidence at that as they went in to lunch.

It was always a good meal at Wrigglesworth's and that day in the shortest space of time put them all at their ease. Matteo, conscious that it was costing half-a-crown a head, at least, set out from the very beginning with the intention of doing it justice, while Charles Henry, perceiving boiled silverside with dumplings and roly-poly to follow on the menu, tucked his serviette inside his collar to preserve that coat his old woman had ironed and sat himself squarely on his chair.

"I believe it isn't considered the proper thing to talk about food," he said, "but I must confess I like silverside and dumplin' with roly-poly to follow. I can't play on a meal like that—not directly after, I can't. But the next day, somehow, I feel it's put heart into me."

Receiving a glance from John, he subsided. There was no knowing what Charles Henry might say. He was an honest man, as has been seen, unashamed of the occasional indignities of his profession. And if ever there were a situation in which an honest man could not be trusted, it was that in which they found themselves this critical morning at Wrigglesworth's.

Matteo—as they say in these days of jerry-build-

ing—was as safe as a house. There was no fear of him. Unscrupulous to a degree, he could be trusted to give the very best impression available. While Charles Henry consumed his silverside and his dumplings in silence, Allievi talked of the romances of his pupils. There was some romance, he declared, with every one. He could not teach, he could not live without it.

It all became a huge success, moreover full of laughter to John who, in a capacity of his own, could stand aside and look on at Charles Henry's restraint over the food he was enjoying no less than Matteo's bewildering conceit of his attractions.

And once those eccentricities of all artists were accepted by Jill, she enjoyed herself as well as any of them. This was a sense of liberty she had never enjoyed in her life before, this meal with three men in a little eating house where the very atmosphere seemed to give you freedom to say what you liked and being on your best behavior was not a thing that even occurred to you.

There was a contact with life about it she never experienced in Prince of Wales's Terrace. Every moment of the conversation, she felt she was learning something fresh. The conversations at their dinners at home never varied. It never seemed to be what people said, but what you knew they were repeating, that had a spark of interest in it. What they thought of this play or that, this latest novel, that last show at the Academy, these were all opinions that had the essence of staleness in them by reason of the fact that scarcely ever did you

seem to hear an opinion first hand. Every word that was spoken, every idea expressed had the taste of a substitute about it, was never fresh food stimulating the mind to energy.

But here, in this eating house, her mother would have shuddered at and her father condemned as no fit place for any lady, here in the company of two at least of the oddest of men, Jill felt she was touching life at every point, was being admitted into the inner places where people had lives of their own and, when they spoke gave expression to that which had entered their hearts and not been driven in through their ears.

Matteo Allievi, the violinist, for all his conceits and his boastings, was a real man. Obviously from all he told them, he had met life and had his struggle with it. And Charles Henry with his child-like admission that he knew it was not the proper thing to talk of food, yet ignoring propriety because it was so good, he was as human as any of them.

Why should one not talk of good, honest food any more than one talked of the price one had paid for one's motor car? For this was what her father did, and before he had actually purchased it with someone else's money?

Why—a whole host of things and then, suddenly, tumbling back into her memory, why did some men choose to play the bassoon or the oboe?

"Because," said John, "Life's a full orchestra and must have every instrument it needs."

"Because," said Allievi, "the violin would not produce the melody to advantage without the ac-

companiment of those instruments and therefore it is only natural."

"Because," said Charles Henry, swallowing his piece of dumpling after he had bitten it thirty times and without any knowledge of the precept of Mr. Gladstone, "because some men have to be content with what you might call the littleness of life; because some men are made to carry off the big things —they've got the air for it." He waved his hand across the table to Matteo. "Like my friend here. Some men are meant to play the solos for everyone to hear, while others play a note here and there like, but if they get the right person"—he included John and Jill in a romantic and comprehensive glance—"that person'll hear every note they play and it'll sound grand—grand! Little as it is, it'll sound grand!"

It was all a most successful entertainment and the witnesses were accepted without further question.

Jill drove away in her hansom with the three of them standing on the curbstone lifting their hats and it was only when she entered the door of the house in Prince of Wales's Terrace that she began to wonder whether or no the world were upside down.

Chapter XLII: *A Consultation with Margaret*

JOHN had never outgrown that sense of being excited by the receipt of a letter which agitates all young people. No doubt, he was sufficiently accustomed to receiving them as to have lost the sense of intrigue such as a schoolgirl has, home for the holidays, when she receives a letter from one of her school-friends.

That letter, so to speak, is taken into a corner, opened while covert glances are cast in all directions, in order to make sure that nobody is looking, but that everybody sees. It is read with puckered brows and serious expressions and finally put away in a writing case that has a key about the size of a bent hair-pin. And the writing case is locked.

Doubtless John had lost these feelings about letters. A couple of bills are enough to knock all the romance of letter writing and receiving into a cocked hat with most of us. However he, at least, had never lost the romance.

A day without something by post was to him a day ill-begun; it was a day without its message.

For that was what letters were to him—messages—and sometimes of the most disagreeable nature. Nevertheless they were messages with all the ad-

venture of a journey about them. Most of us lose that sense of wonder at a piece of paper traveling unerringly from one hand to another across the whole breadth of the world if need be. Most of us lose the sense of wonder in everything when we pay for its performance. Indeed we lose all the wonder out of life, partly because it is not considered intelligent to be surprised at anything, partly because an intellectual understanding is a line of least resistance and so much easier than belief.

John kept his belief and it must be admitted he had as yet experienced little to test it. He still wondered when he received a check in payment for his work. He still wondered at his own importance when he received a letter.

His habit it always was to open his mail in what he imagined to be the sequence of its interest. He always cut the flap of the envelope with a knife as an exercise in self-control.

On the morning after the lunch at Wrigglesworth's, there were two letters on his plate at breakfast. One from Jill. He put that on one side. The other was addressed to him in an unknown handwriting. He looked at the postmark. It was Kensington. Some instinct stirred and turned in his mind like a sleeper awakening. He felt his fingers more alive as he took it out of its envelope. He spread it out and read its contents:

DEAR SIR,

I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, but I know there is a mutual interest between my daughter and yourself. With regard to this interest I should be much obliged if you

could come and see me this morning at the above address at midday—if that is convenient to you. If it is not, perhaps you will be good enough to make another appointment.

Yours truly,
J. M. DEALTRY.

There was a note in this letter which to John was unmistakable, a combative note which told him that in this new world of reality he had entered there was conflict and stress.

That letter had in it the sound of a bugle, calling him out to fight; and it was not that he was afraid, but that he suddenly was conscious he had never had to fight before. He felt ill-equipped, like a soldier with nothing but his bare fists who must go out and face all the murderous instruments of war. And though his love of Jill was a band that played him with its inspiring music into the battle, he felt suddenly that when it came to the actual fighting, the noise of the blows might be so loud as to drown the music in his ears; that there were things in this world that loomed, with a forced perspective, bigger than love and, at the moment of conflict swept Love out, not in reality—but for the time being in the hearts of them that fought.

It seemed to him that all that was in his heart was not a weapon but only a purpose of his spirit, and had no power against the highly efficient and modern weapons of expediency. He believed in some inner consciousness that he would be killed, but that the purpose in him would not be beaten. He knew, in the bugle call of that letter, that the whole army of materialism had been called forth

to meet him and that nothing but the miracle of God would bring him out unscathed and victorious from the fray.

In a daze of mind, he turned to Jill's letter and read it. It was a hurried note, every word spelling apprehension and warning him of this which had become an accomplished fact.

"If he does send for you," her note ended, *"don't get angry or say anything that'll make it more difficult. Humor him and give in a bit here and there—it's the only way."*

If Mr. Dealtry's letter had brought him to a sudden and serious consideration of life, this, though far it may have been from her intention, struck fear deep down into the corners of his heart.

She was urging for compromise when it seemed to him there was nothing but the bloodiest of encounters to achieve decision. It was as though she had put into his hand at the last moment a weapon he neither had the cunning nor the heart to wield; a weapon he believed would buckle like a piece of tin at the first straight blow that fell upon it.

With a sigh of despair, he put her letter away and went out without touching his breakfast.

Some impulse he did not try to follow, brought him to Margaret in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The tender look in her face, the protection of her arms about those—others—brought back some of the courage he needed.

"Margaret," he said in a voice that was aloud to him, "Margaret, I know something I didn't know before. I know that I'm alone. I know

that even with all the gift of your life to help others, your arms can't stretch round me."

He looked at her and always she gave that tender smile to her—others; to her John and her Peter, as he and Jill had christened two of them.

"Will—she ever come," he went on, as though Margaret were listening to every word he said. "Will she ever come so close with her hand in mine and her arms like yours, so that we can go together —heart and soul and body together—or must it always be alone? Is it best to be alone?"

But Margaret gave no answer, unless it were in the seeming movement of a little further stretching out her arms, of taking one of the others a heart's beat nearer to her breast.

Chapter XLIII: *The Primitive Instinct*

AS the door was thrown open and John entered the hall in the Prince of Wales's Terrace, there was a swift brush of skirts from an adjacent door and Jill was beside him.

"I don't expect he'll allow you to see me," she whispered, "but I must—I must! I know he'll say horrible things—horrible and cruel things—but I must see you! I don't think any of the things he'll say. Believe that. I know I don't think them."

She had a note in her voice convincing herself as well as him, but it was all too confused for him to catch it then.

"I'll come down to Fetter Lane to-morrow morning," said she, "then you can tell me everything. To-morrow morning at 11 o'clock."

That was all. She had gone through the doorway again and he was being led down the hall to a far room which, with its very distance, increased the apprehension of all that lay before him. But he believed he was not alone. He had asked Margaret and she had given him no answer. It was Jill who, unasked, had replied to his question. It was not best to be alone. She was with him.

The servant whom he assumed must have been in Jill's confidence, since she did not hesitate to

speak before her, ushered him into Mr. Dealtry's study, announcing his name.

The door closed behind him. He heard it shut him in. Then he became aware of two people, both of whom rose to their feet. Mr. Dealtry came forward and held out his hand in that manner as gave John to understand that a public school and the university had made it impossible for him to be anything but a gentleman.

"Good morning, Mr. Grey," said he, and then: "This is my wife."

Mrs. Dealtry bowed and sat down. A chair was pulled out for John. They all sat down.

"I won't beat about the bush, Mr. Grey," Mr. Dealtry began, using the phrase and adopting the tone of voice which gives a guarantee that a man knows his own mind while it does not absolutely constitute a hall-mark.

"I won't beat about the bush. I said in my letter that I knew there was a mutual interest between my daughter and yourself. That is so—isn't it?"

"It is," said John.

Mr. Dealtry picked up a paper from his desk. John recognized it at once.

"May I ask," said he, showing it to John, "if this fairly expresses the state and the—what shall I say?"

"Spirit," said Mrs. Dealtry.

"Yes—the spirit of that interest which you admit?"

John looked at it once. It was the poem he had read and given her in the Zoo.

"Let's take it you and I in lingering fingers
And turn it to beauty out of the virgin gold."

Just that couplet brought itself to his eye and then he looked back at Mr. Dealtry.

"It does express the spirit," he replied, "of what I feel about her."

Mr. Dealtry spread it out upon the table before him and for a moment allowed his eye to wander critically over the lines. There was a poignant silence. It was in that silence John realized he was stronger than either of them. He was not alone. They thought they had him there at their mercy. But they were wrong. They could not see inside his heart and Jill was there.

Presently Mr. Dealtry looked up.

"I'm not a judge of poetry," said he, "but I am sure in a world of pretty fancy and flowery imagination, this is quite—quite pleasing to read. It—it has a swing about it."

"Not much swing," said John. "The meter's all over the shop. It's not meant to sing you to sleep; it's meant to give you a thought."

"Well—I accept your technical criticism of it, but naturally enough I haven't sent for you to learn your verses or anything about them except in so much as they affect my daughter. And you confirm your previous admission that these verses embody the spirit of what you feel about her. You say they are intended to give thoughts. They were then intended to make her think and think what they conveyed was true."

"Certainly."

"You think, then, it is a practical view of life to make it a woodland freshet—I suppose that's a stream—where the mosses grow?"

There was an instant when John would have left the room without another word. He did not betray the impulse. He sat there rigid in his silence for a moment.

"Are you taking that literally?" asked John presently, "or are you allowing for the freedom of the picture intended to convey the thought?"

"I'm taking it as I read it," said Mr. Dealtry.

"Well, you see," said John, "that is liable to confuse me, since I don't know either the quality of your intelligence or your imagination."

"I hope both are quite normal," said Mr. Dealtry.

"I hope so," replied John.

Mr. Dealtry looked at him sharply, then across at his wife. Mrs. Dealtry turned away as though she had made up her mind that no good could come of this interview. In those first few moments she had summed up their visitor, had placed and weighed him in her own scales. He was one of those having no appreciation or value of the homely virtue of common sense. He was an idealist, the most dangerous of all people a young girl can meet. Unless they were very careful, their Jill would not steer through this dangerous passage of her life. For here was a type of man with failure stamped in every expression of his face.

She had met one or two successful novelists at various At Homes and they none had that look about them. They probably stood in queer attitudes

and, when they talked, spoke as though they expected to be listened to. Often they said daring and what sounded like clever things—but they knew the best people.

This young man, so she had appraised him, would never be successful, unless by some amazing freak of chance, and she did not count upon those in any sane view of life. He would go through the world like a pedlar, with holes in his shoes and a bundle of ideals in his pack. He would only sell his work to romantic and foolish folk. Never would he make a trade in the open market where her England had achieved its greatness.

Unless her husband spoke more to the point and very soon, she felt she would be unable to keep the dignity of her silence much longer.

"Well—going on," continued Mr. Dealtry, when he had satisfied himself that it was still to be his innings, "going on past these people treading unrelenting presses and a picture of you plunging your face in the water—I suppose you imply by that, just drinking water—and so on, not particularly referring to this listening to blackbirds in what you call the cathedraled sky, we come to this verse:

Is life the finer hammered on an anvil?
  Flung in the furnace? Hastened to shape within the mold?
Let's take it you and I in lingering fingers
  And turn it to beauty out of the virgin gold.

"As a matter of curiosity, I should just like to know where, if you don't want to do a bit of hard work with a hammer, if you're so averse to being hastened into shape, I should like to know where

you're going to get your gold from? No man I ever came across, made money without doing some work for it. Where are you going to get your gold?"

It sounded to him as he put the question, the biggest crux of a question it was possible to put. He had to do all he knew not to chuckle as he said it.

John's reply was such a surprise to him that he gave up his innings, and was very doubtful as to whether he had succeeded in carrying his bat.

"I'm sure you didn't ask me here to criticise my verses on their literary merit," said John. "In fact, from all the bewildering things you have said, I am quite certain that is the case. I'm convinced you're aware of the fact that you don't know the difference between a line of verse and the directions on a medicine bottle, so aren't we wasting time a bit by talking of my poetry, because you make me naturally quite incapable of discussing it. And if there is to be a discussion about Jill, I'd like to keep my wits and my temper somewhat about me."

Mr. Dealtry stared at John in a mute astonishment. He could not speak. He did not even try to. Was this intended to be an affront, he asked himself, because if it were, then he ought to say something in reply. But he had nothing to say. He thought he had been making such remarkable headway in a difficult situation and here was all the wind taken out of his sails. He felt in just that flabby condition as when the canvas droops against the mast in a lull of the breeze.

Further, to convince him what a failure he had made of it, his wife took the matter completely out of his hands.

"Mr. Grey's quite right," said she with austerity. "We did not bring him here to discuss his poetry. Whether it's good or bad doesn't make any difference. The principal fact is that it does not provide a living—so I understand from people who know about these things—and it has been brought to our notice that Mr. Grey is proposing to marry Jill, proposing to marry her when, judging by the place in which he resides, he is scarcely able to provide a living for himself. Would you mind telling us, Mr. Grey, what your income is? I've no doubt to you this sounds very matter-of-fact, but it is the duty of parents to see that their children set out in a difficult world with the best advantages. We don't want to appear curious, but we should like to hear what your income is."

"I'm making a hundred and seventy-five pounds a year," said John. "And next year I shall make more and the year after still more. With Jill to help me and give me a purpose in life, I can't fail. You're quite right. Poetry doesn't pay. But I don't only write verse. I'm writing books and short stories."

"A hundred and seventy-five pounds a year," repeated Mrs. Dealtry, as though every other word John had said had escaped her. "Dear, oh, dear—I wouldn't have believed it possible for a man with any sense of chivalry or honor to propose to take a girl away from the comfort of her home to endure

such poverty as that. I—simply—I couldn't have believed it."

She was so convinced of what she said that all those sensations of being a cad returned in overwhelming force to John's mind. Here was the weak spot in his armor and with the inspiration of a mother's instinct, she had detected it. She loved Jill and she was fighting for her, and what she, in her generation, had found to be happiness, she was determined that Jill, in her generation should have as well.

What her intellect was utterly incapable of appreciating was that happiness was no fixed or concrete thing, but that it changed with every generation and even then was not the same in any two minds at once.

It was in reality her own conception of happiness she was fighting for, as much as for Jill. She did not know the things she believed in were rotten to the core. She believed in them—that was enough. She had believed in them all her life. She was the product of a material Civilization. It had given her nationality in the wealthiest country in the world. It had given her a home in the Prince of Wales's Terrace. It had given her a circle of acquaintances amongst the best people, many with titles. All these things it had given her and, in the drought of her heart, she had accepted them as tangible symbols of happiness, as tangible as the comfort of a hot bath.

She was proud to belong to that Civilization. She was proud to be an Englishwoman and though

she might assist her husband in his efforts to cheat the Income tax, she certainly would not forfeit her rights to real English happiness.

It was this happiness she was fighting for, on Jill's behalf, and fighting with all the craft and cunning of which her mother's heart was capable. Jill must be happy and whether this young man was a great poet or not, whether or no it were true that Jill could help him in his work, she would hate him and all he did if it added one iota to the strength she needed for the conflict.

There had entered her heart, the moment she heard him speak, the moment she saw his face, that instinctive hatred of the mother for every creature that threatens to deprive her of her young. She knew she could take a keen pleasure in torturing John's heart if, by the pain of it, he could be induced to let go his hold on Jill. Nothing he suffered could wring pity from her. She would have laughed and jeered at his tears had he shed them. And the more she felt this enmity—an unreasoned, elemental instinct in her—the more she lost what little appreciation she had of the thing that might be happiness to Jill.

She had indeed reverted to a distant type. All the higher and nobler qualities of understanding were swept out of her mind with the passion of this primitive emotion. Yet she spoke with a quietness that was remarkable in its distinction from the blustering tones of her husband.

John might almost have thought she was sorry for the struggle he had with life. She purred her

words. She looked softly as she spoke. There was a note of tender complaint in her voice.

When she added that last phrase: "I simply couldn't have believed it," she glanced at him almost with pity in her expression and, seeing the iron enter his heart, was all the time rejoicing in her soul and crying out to herself what a soft-hearted fool he was.

As unused to craft and guile as John must be supposed to have been, there can scarcely exist any wonder that he was no match for the stealth of such an opponent as Mrs. Dealtry. All he had were his ideals and no sophistry with which to match them against the wiles of his antagonist.

"What is it your daughter is really going to suffer," he asked in reply, "if she gives up the comfort of her home here to come out, side by side, with a man she loves and fight for her place in the world with him? A man has to do it when he strikes out into life for himself. He has to give up comforts he had at home. I was comfortable at home once with parents who cared for me. And no doubt I suffered bodily discomforts when I began to make my way—but I should have been a deal more uncomfortable in my mind if I'd stayed. Why should your daughter suffer more than me? She will have some one at her side with love to give her. I had no one."

"I won't comment," said Mrs. Dealtry gently, "on the selfishness and egotism of what you are saying. I am sure you have the power to appreciate a virtue when you see it. I will only confine myself

to an answer to your question. The discomfort my daughter will suffer will arise out of the fact that she is used to a home like this and not a couple of rooms in what I might call the slums of London."

"There are people," said John, "who are used to receiving twenty per cent for their investments—but that doesn't say it's right and it doesn't say it's good for them."

"I should like to know," said Mr. Dealtry, "where people are getting their twenty per cent."

"We'll keep business out of this discussion," said his wife, who was determined the talk should be of things she understood. "Mr. Grey's allusion to speculation has nothing to do with this affair—nothing at all."

Suddenly then, John saw red. His heart came into his mouth and he spoke it, without thought of consequence, without consideration of cost or expediency.

"But it's all to do with speculation!" he cried. "You're speculating with your daughter's happiness—gambling with it. You want to marry her to a rich man. You want her to get her twenty per cent out of life by a doubtful investment. You don't ask yourselves really whether she is going to be happy in that speculation, but just that she should get her twenty per cent without working for it. But it's work that is the happiness in this world and the idle speculator drawing his fat dividends is wretched in his heart. He doesn't know what happiness is. It's happiness to make your life, not to sit in idleness and have it made for you. You want for her

the clothes she can put on her back, the money she can put in her purse, you don't want the joy she can put in her heart. These things—the things you say she's used to—are not the things that make joy. They all contribute to a sense of staleness in life if you're used to them. That's what you make of life. You make it stale. You'd have everybody inherit rather than earn. You'd give them the things they're used to rather than the things that are new. And that's just the way people and nations and whole civilizations and religions fag themselves out to degeneracy—because they catch hold of the things they're used to rather than the adventure and the health of the things that are new."

He stopped for breath and, as he looked at their two faces there in the silence of that room, he wondered what he had said and in the quiet, subdued smile of triumph on Mrs. Dealtry's face, he realized that so far as they were concerned, he had lost everything.

"George," she said to her husband, "you might ring the bell and let them know Mr. Grey is going. I think you understood as well as I that Mr. Grey was a gentleman at least. Hyde Park socialism probably has its place, but it's not in our house, nor from the way we have brought her up will it ever be in Jill's."

John stood quickly to his feet.

"Does this mean you refuse to let your daughter marry me?" he asked.

"We can't refuse," said Mrs. Dealtry, "she's over twenty-one. That is to say we can't prevent her.

It's only that you've made so much easier by what you've said, the advice we can give her about her future. I am sure you will realize, Mr. Grey, that it is something in a difficult world for a girl to cling to the belief that she is a lady. I know my daughter will always be that."

The door opened. It remained open. They watched him all the way across the hall till he had gone. He had no sight of Jill.

Chapter XLIV: *Charles Henry Quirk & Co.*

THERE was little sleep for John that night; little effort indeed on his part to induce it. For some hours after he had gone to bed, he sat with his hands huddled up against his chin, staring at the wall in front of him, on which hung a little reproduction of the portrait of Beatrice d'Este by di Predis.

It was not so much that he was thinking of her. More it was, almost the whole of that time, he was thinking of nothing; just vibrative to countless sensations, but that was all. With his eyes he saw that familiar, childish face, of Beatrice d'Este, pale with the sudden redness of its lips, a little tilt at the end of the nose, the round chin, the open forehead, the wonder in the eye. He saw the full color of that auburn hair, tied in a ribband beneath her chin, bound with a fillet about her head. He could see the firm, straight neck, the high and virtuous bodice of her dress, the red stone, as though it held the secret of the blood that was warm in her veins, that lay like a talisman on her breast: all these things he could see as he sat there like a tailor on his bench, but in the consciousness of his mind there was no thought of her; no thought of Jill or of

Amber, or the scene that had taken place that morning in Prince of Wales's Terrace.

One sensation after another played upon the strings of the instrument of his mind. All improvisations they were; never once the thoughtfully-constructed melody. Without prelude they came. Without fulfillment of expression, they faded away. . He could not think. No thoughts were with him. All that he felt was, in the abstract, no more than senses of fear, of courage, of doubt, of belief, of hope and then despair. He did not know what the morrow would bring him and he neither dared nor was he able to come at knowledge by any process of thought.

If Jill came in the morning as she had promised, it was she who would bring revelation and set free the normal operations of his brain. Until then he could only sit, huddled in mind and body, waiting for the hour of his deliverance.

He ate no breakfast the next morning. In this condition, when the physical and definite processes of his being are held in rigid arrest, food is not so much nauseous to a man, as that it does not enter his conception of necessity.

John told Mrs. Rowse to clear away the things directly he came in from his bedroom and saw that breakfast was there, waiting on the table.

"Don't you feel well, then, sir—or something?"

"I feel all right," said he, and looked at and straight through her, which gave her so uncanny a sensation that she began taking up the breakfast things without another word.

She recounted this incident to her husband who, when he was sober, sat patiently, as men do with their women-folk, and listened to a bit of gossip just as though she had been reading extracts to him out of the Sunday papers.

" 'E made me feel," said Mrs. Rowse, " 'e made me feel just as if I'd got no clothes. Well—you'd 'a' thought that 'ud have made me nervous, uncomfortable—wouldn't yer? It didn't. It made me feel annoyed at first; 'cos while I felt I'd got no clothes on, there 'e was lookin' as though 'e never noticed it."

Mrs. Rowse was always somewhat complicated in her statements and descriptions. Probably some woman, reading this, will know at once what she meant, and with some man, it may be that half-an-hour afterwards, while he is buttoning or hooking up his wife's dress at the back, he will suddenly give vent to a guffaw.

Whatever she felt, she took away the breakfast things without another word and left him alone. Then, punctually at eleven, came Jill.

He heard the sound of footsteps up the stairs and knew, by the sudden chill that followed a jerk in his heart, that they were Jill's. But he could not move to the door. He stood at the other end of the room by his desk and when she knocked, without putting forward a step, he called out: "Come in."

She entered; closed the door softly behind her, stood there silent a moment while his eyes for the first time narrowed to reality and a searching glance.

The next moment she was across the room and in his arms crying out:

"You do love me, don't you? They said you didn't love me at all; that you were just selfishly trying to get your own pleasure and had no thought of my happiness at all. Say you love me, say it—say it—do say it now."

And he said it out of all the deepest purpose of his heart and held her there in his arms for a long while, kissing her cheek, her eyes, her forehead, her neck, her hair and feeling he could wait for months when life was even greater than then to kiss her lips.

Still holding her close in his arms, he asked her what more they had said and listened to the impression he had made in Prince of Wales's Terrace. The impression it was of witlessness, of egotism, of insensibility to the feelings of others and all the accepted standards of life.

"They think you want to marry me because—because—we're better off and it may help you to get on and be successful with your work."

He laughed but did not let her go.

"They think," she went on, "that you're a menace to—these are their words—to all that's best in English life. They painted for me all the squalor and discomfort of the life I should have with you here—because they know how small and inconvenient it is. I told them that."

"You told them that?" said John.

"Yes—did you mind?"

"No. I don't mind."

"They said I should be miserable in a few months. They more or less said what Father Peake did about children. I knew they'd do that. And of course they think your selfishness in wanting to give me a life like that, is—unspeakable. Father stands amazed at it. He says he didn't think men could be——"

"What?"

"Oh—I forget what word he used."

"No, you don't."

"Yes—I forget."

"No—you don't, my dear. You don't forget. What word was it?"

"Such—such cads," she whispered, and felt the solidity of ice all through John's body.

"But I don't care what they say," she went on vehemently. "I don't care. I want love. I must have love!" And she clung so close to him that he felt every line of her body against his own.

And then, as they stood there, his arms about her, her body one with his, there came the sounds of music out in the street below. It was an old familiar tune—a tune as old to John as the carpet with its inkstains, as old as the marks on the wall-paper where pictures had been hung and taken away:

> Come lassies and lads
> Get leave of your dads
> And away to the May-pole high.

Yet old as it was, there was something new about it that morning which arrested him. Not only was

it played upon the clarionet. The notes of a violin came mingled with it and made it all strange in his ears. He dropped his arms gently from Jill's shoulders and he went to the window. For an instant he knew nothing but surprise and then laughter came to him like a gush of water from a stream that had been dammed.

There, by the side of the curbstone, standing in the gutter, were Charles Henry Quirk and Matteo Allievi, a united couple in the business of life, amalgamating their efforts to produce the same old tunes for the pleasure or annoyance of their fellowmen.

Hearing his laughter, Jill was on the moment at his side, holding his arm and looking down into the street below.

"Poor old Charles Henry," said John, still laughing. "He'll lose all his fineness of distinction now. That Allievi with all the flourish of his bow, is only a charlatan at best. He'll destroy the honest art of Charles Henry. As soon as he finds out where the bread is buttered, he'll take Charles Henry every day to the places where they pay him to go into the next street. Charles Henry won't be playing for his little slaveys on the doorsteps any more. I suppose it's sad—but it's damned funny!"

He looked round at Jill with the laughter still in his eyes and found her face pale and set, as far from laughter as the poles are sundered.

"They're the men," she said in a breath.

"Yes."

"The men we had lunch with?"

"Yes, my dear."

"The men who were going to be witnesses to—to our marriage."

"Yes, I know."

His throat was dry. With an effort, he moistened it.

"Then they aren't—really—good musicians. I—I thought they played in Queen's Hall—places like that—I didn't know they played in the gutter."

John took a deep breath, such a breath as a man must take to keep the courage of his soul when he hears the sentence of death passed upon him.

He reached down for her hand and led her away from the window. Guiding her gently by her shoulders, he set her down in the chair in which he worked, then stood before her.

"Jill, my dear," said he in a strange voice. "You've got to listen to every word I say."

Chapter XLV: *Goldsmith's Grave*

SHE sat in his chair and listened, sometimes her lip quivering, always her eyes very big and soft with tears that had not gathered weight to fall.

After that last caress conveyed in the guiding of her shoulders as he brought her to the chair, John did not touch her again. For the first few moments he stood with his back to the fire-place, never moving and with his eyes fixed straight before him as he talked. Later he came away from that place and walked up and down the room as words came more easily to be said.

"All that your father and mother told you yesterday after I'd gone—everything they said sounded cruel, unsympathetic, unjust, didn't it?" This was how he began, standing there by the fire-place.

She just inclined her head.

"And it's hard to see the reason and the common-sense of what people say when you believe them to be cruel and unjust—isn't it?"

Her silence admitted that to be true.

"But supposing I were to have said it all," he went on. "Not about my being a cad—not about my wanting to marry you to improve my position, because that was their cruelty and injustice; that

was how they destroyed the force of all their arguments. They were cads to have said it and nothing that a cad says sounds true. Supposing I were to have told you that life here with me in three rooms, or wherever we chose to live, would be difficult for you—a struggle—a beating against head-winds and a heavy tide. Supposing I were to have pointed out that in marrying me, you would have inevitably to take part in that struggle, not in the making of money, but in sharing, cheerfully and with a sense of laughter at life, sharing in the frequent want of it?"

Suddenly he turned for the first time and looked at her, and had she looked at him she would have seen he had suddenly grown old, a child no longer as he had always seemed, even in his appearance, but an old man. There was not a line in his face to indicate it. It lay in his eyes. They had suddenly grown tired, and there was that fear in them as in the eyes of one who has a long journey before him and has just found in his heart the doubt that he will ever reach his journey's end. His eyes were gray but now they were the gray of a river in winter that would become solid ice were it not so swift—the gray of a river in which snow has melted as it tumbled from the trees.

"Do you see anything dignified in poverty?" he asked her with a sudden directness.

Her eyes grew puzzled as she stared before her.

"Dignified? It's such a funny word," said she.

"Oh—all right. Well, then, do you see any laughter in poverty—the humor of it—the fun and

the adventure of your wriggling out and scraping through; of having streets with mad dogs in them and being compelled to walk half a mile out of your way to avoid them and get home?"

"Mad dogs?"

"Yes—bills."

"I see—I didn't realize what you meant."

"Well, do you see any fun, any adventure in that—do you see anything to laugh at at all?"

"Not to laugh at, John—you don't mean to laugh at. I'm sure I could stand it all right for a bit. But then I believe you're going to get on. You're going to make money. You've said so yourself. We shouldn't be poor for long. I know I shouldn't whine about it, but I don't see how I could laugh."

It was then John began walking up and down the room, backwards and forwards as though something were at his heels in pursuit of him.

"Supposing I told you you couldn't get through life without laughter? Supposing I said life were a long journey, if you saw all the way without a turn in the road, and that laughter was the water in the leather bottle slung round your shoulder to moisten your lips when they were parched with thirst, to clear your eyes, to cool your heart when it felt burning and dry. Supposing I said, if you and I don't set out with laughter in our hearts we should die? Would you hesitate then? Would you begin to believe that what your people said was right, only they said it the wrong way?"

She did not answer. Her lips quivered. She

pulled out her handkerchief and knowing that once she began to cry she would cry till her heart broke, she put her handkerchief back again. It seemed she had come of a sudden upon a need for pride. What she had wanted from John was help, strength, courage to go through with all, which despite their cruelty, and injustice, her parents had shown her to be the most difficult moments of her life. He seemed to be giving her none of these. And with all he said, it seemed more difficult than it had been before.

It was not only what he was saying, but the strange distance that had come in his voice as though he had lost sympathy and did not realize all she had been willing to face for his sake. For it was not a little. The losing of her friends—well, perhaps her real friends might still wish to see her, but such friends were few; the discomforts which he had acknowledged her father was right in pointing out, these were all sacrifices he seemed to have lost sight of, yet was increasing her consciousness of the fact that she was making them.

For it was not as though they were new to her. That day when they went to the Zoo, she had believed those sacrifices to be unmakable. Then love had persuaded her to courage and she had been prepared to face anything for love. It was love she needed, and she did not want to think of it in any light but that of the very brightest. Had she seen inside John's mind as he stood outside the prison at Holloway, had she heard his laughter at the thought that the marble walls of the Alcazar

Restaurant were conceived to give people the impression they had had a good meal, that the silk and the brocade in the theaters were intended to make them feel comfortable in their bodies when their minds were discomfited by a foolish play, had she realized his mind then, she still would have been unable to associate its ideas with this desire in her heart to set love in the brightest light in order to make it seem what she believed of it.

Upon a pedestal she had set love, as most girls do; and about that pedestal she had built a bower of roses to fence it off from life. Love was a dream world to her, a place of magic happenings, of fountains playing in the sun, of fairy glens and mid-summer night's ecstasy. Love was a prince in armor with a sword forever drawn to assail the slightest sadness that threatened her. She could not see Love in an ordinary pair of trousers that life had frayed, carrying—only on rarest occasions —an umbrella that had been bought for half-a-crown at a lost property sale.

Had not John written himself:

> But you and I will find earth's quiet places
> Make Life a woodland freshet where the mosses grow.

That was what she wanted and, in wanting it in reality, had taken it for its beauty as literally as her father had done for its folly.

John had shown her love. Why then was he saying all this? Why was he not keeping love before her eyes to give her courage when her heart was failing?

She looked down on the ground in her distress and saw John's feet as he stood beside her and saw the frayed ends of his trousers. As her eye traveled up, in a sudden wonder to look at his face, she noticed the unlinked cuffs of his shirt sleeve. And then his face when, fight as she would against the thought of it, she found for the first time in all the times they had met, that it looked—poor. It was beyond all power of her understanding in the stress of those moments, to realize that poverty was pain. She did not know he was suffering. She could only think how much she was suffering herself at this fear of losing love.

So came Jill, round her corner of life into the World of Wonderful Reality, and the first glimpse of it set a chill with iron fingers close about her heart.

When she gave no answer to his questions, John began walking the room again, still speaking from his distance, still hurting her with every word he said when, in those moments, his heart to hers had never been so close.

"Love," he said, almost as though he guessed what had been passing in her mind, "love is wonder, as well as beauty, and it has as much of pain in it as it has of pleasure. It isn't a thing that only carries people through the happy places. Much more is it a spirit that bears you through the dark forests and the silent wilderness. It's a thing to face life with, to make life with, more than to enjoy life with. You walk with it through the open country, but it's most wonderful of all

when it can take you down gutters with a happy heart. Love's realized in some human being, it's not a symbol, a thing in itself. You can think about love and dream about love and imagine all that it is—but nothing do you know of love at all till it comes to you in the mind and the body and the soul of just one person in whom you recognize it."

Suddenly he came up to her side and, almost to her surprise, dropped on his knees by her chair.

"Do you love me like that?" he asked with a quick breath.

She tried to answer him—yes—but the word, unqualified, would not come alone.

"Of course I do," she said slowly, "but you're speaking so differently to-day. You've never talked like this before. You've always made love and life out to be so full of beauty. That's how—how you've made me believe in it before anything else. Now you talk of it in gutters, a thing of pain as much as pleasure. Almost you make me afraid of it—really you do. And we've come to no decision. I thought you were going to help me to put away the impression of what they said and you haven't helped me in the least. I feel almost alone now, and I've got to go. They'll guess I'm here if I stay any longer. I must go."

She rose to her feet and as she turned to the door, the tears gathered the fullness of their weight and tumbled down her cheeks.

"Which way are you going?" he asked.

"Underground—from Temple Station."

He said he would walk with her there and they went down the stairs together.

All down Fetter Lane, they never spoke. He felt he could say no more than he had said. She felt she could hear no more.

Turning in by Inner Temple Gate, they walked down towards the Church, feeling it was a stream in flood that bore them and bore them on to the swirling waters of the whirlpool of life. As they passed the turning of Dr. Johnson's Buildings, John stretched out his hand to catch a branch, just for an instant to stay the rush of their passage, in the broil of the waters.

"Just come along for a moment to Goldsmith's Grave," said he and, wondering, she went with him.

Beside that gray grave stone that lies in the gravel, he took her hand and made her eyes look to his.

"You think I've talked differently to-day," said he quietly. "Perhaps I have. I've talked with more love in my heart and more understanding of it than ever I've had in my life before. I'll guard and keep you *through* everything—but I can't keep you *out of* the gutters or the dark forests, or the sad places of life. If ever you need to know or to remember what love is, come back here to Goldsmith's Grave and think of that. No man can keep you out of the sad places—only with his love, he can keep you through everything in the world. And that's what I'm here for—if you'll believe in me. That's more than half of what love is—be-

lief. The woman who believes the best of her man, gets the best out of him. If you believe in me, love will bring us through the meanest streets."

She looked as though her heart were breaking and then they turned away.

At the steps down to the Underground, she held his hand an instant.

"I know you love me in your way," she said, and then she was gone. A few steps, a mingling with a mass of people and he could see her no more.

Chapter XLVI: *An Exercise in Mental Occupation*

THAT morning's shopping in Holborn, no less than the game of being a millionaire in Bond Street, had revived memories in Amber's mind she found herself unable to set at rest.

Never had she made herself so busy about the house in Hogarth Road. A sudden conviction that all the china wanted cleaning seized hold upon her, whereupon she found basin, warm water and an old nail-brush and set to work, seated on the floor surrounded by mountains of china, the skin of her fingers wrinkling more and more like a washerwoman's, and singing her whole vast repertoire of snatches till her mother gazed at her in amazement.

"You seem to have got something to make you full of life," said she.

"P'raps I have," said Amber and scrubbed harder than ever with the nail-brush in the crevices.

But those memories were not to be hidden away by soap-lather, the voice of them was not to be drowned by her singing. And the key that admitted them back again into her heart was that poem of parting she had found on John's desk. Again and again as she slammed the doors of recollection,

some demon of mischief or revenge slipped the key into the lock, turned it and the door swung open again.

When the china was done, she cleaned brass. When that was done, she sat down and played the piano, the few odd things she knew. The execution of music was not a thing she had any heart for. Her songs were not music. They were more the —patter—of her mind. But playing the piano in those moments was something to do and when that had become an occupation no longer, she thrust a hat on her head and went out.

Involuntarily she found herself going East. She was not going to see John. That, in the midst of confusion, was the one clear thing in her mind. She was not going to see John. To begin with she had not so much as twopence for a bus and certainly she was not going to walk all that way to Fetter Lane.

If there was one thing in life she hated more than another, it was making a fool of herself. And a fool she certainly would be to seek John out when now she knew so well how much his heart and mind were understood and satisfied by Jill.

"He's a bit of a poet," she said aloud to herself as she walked, "and Lord knows, I could never understand a poet. They must be a bit daft, and if there's one thing I am, it is sane. I am sane."

Seeing a man coming towards her, she dropped her voice to silence and felt annoyed with him for his interruption. As soon as he had passed, she went on again.

"I wonder if he's really worth understanding?" she said. It was a new thought and had never occurred to her before. "I suppose a man can write, like he does, without having much in him. I wonder if what he writes is really good. But why should writing, or painting or anything, make a man different from others? I can't see why it should. It's only because he sits down and thinks a lot of things and then puts them on paper. He's clever, of course, but so are doctors and so are barristers and people like that. They don't go about wanting to be understood. They just fall in love in the ordinary sort of way and I suppose they've got ideas too, but they don't make a fuss about them. John does make a fuss about his ideas and his understanding. I must say that. He talks an awful lot and then of course he's fool enough to do what he says. And he doesn't always do that. But thank God! he can laugh when he likes. He can have a bit of fun when he isn't in a mood."

She stopped. This talking, like the washing of the china and the cleaning of the brass, was leading to no good. It had started splendidly. She was beginning to believe there was little sentiment left in her heart about John at all, and then suddenly, open swung the door of recollection once more, and she was welcoming memories of days when they had laughed together, as at the Rest House when they had told them they ought to be—Friends.

It was just that game of being a millionaire that had done it. It was when he was like that, she thought him the best of all possible companions and

companionship was a good thing to her. Indeed, she asked for little else. It was dearer to her than all the greatest passions in the world.

Cromwell Road had turned into South Kensington, South Kensington had led in the Brompton Road. She had one penny and she took a 'bus, and in those days with a penny you could get to Charing Cross.

The Strand is an amusing thoroughfare. It always was. I suppose it always will be. It mixes the amusements and the business of Life with more ingredients than any other street in London. You know what you may expect in almost every other neighborhood; you know the type of person you are likely to meet. But in the Strand there are people making towards the Law Courts, there are theatrical agents in the by-streets and publishers grow like currents on a bush. It is the approach to Fleet Street and the newspaper world and in the midst of it all stands St. Mary-le-Strand, parting the tide of Commerce and cherishing her quiet memories of the days when she stood in the peace and reverence of green fields.

There was enough attraction for anyone and certainly enough to bring Amber along that enticing thoroughfare. She walked from shop window to shop window, always meaning to turn back but always going on. And when she came in sight of the Law Courts there was sudden realization for her of a purpose in having come so far. She would go into one of the courts and listen to a case.

In less than five minutes, she found herself in

a gallery with a few others, listening to a case concerning the right-of-way across a brick field. She got so annoyed at the thought of people spending hundreds of pounds to establish the right to keep the public from a narrow path, one foot wide, across a filthy brick field, that she came out and why she did so, she could not have told, but when she reached the street again, she turned to the left.

The Law Courts—Chancery Lane—Fetter Lane. To avoid the last, she turned into the passage and went under the archway that leads to Clifford's Inn. She had always thought of looking round Clifford's Inn and now, in its quiet courts, where she might have expected her mind to find repose, her heart began an importunate thumping once she came alone with her thoughts. The Strand had been too busy to let her think. But thoughts now came hot and swift upon her.

She wanted to go and see John. She knew now she wanted to go and see him. But she wouldn't go! She wouldn't go! That she was determined upon. Tramping round Clifford's Inn on those flatworn stones, she saw a gateway and made directly towards it. She would not go and see him! She would go straight home from there and, passing hastily through an iron gate-way to wherever it led, she found herself in Fetter Lane.

Chapter XLVII: *Jack of Clubs and Queen of Hearts*

IT is no good pretending there is anything haphazard about life. Circumstance may have all the appearance of shuffling the cards, but if the Jack of Clubs is to lie next to the Queen of Hearts, the hand of circumstance may shuffle for a week of Sundays yet there will he be. Circumstance may efface the sword he carries, but whatever it may do, while it sorts the cards out one by one, makes not a ha'porth of difference once the affair is left to Chance and the shuffling has begun.

With the sternest intentions in the world, Amber walked out of that gate, determined upon going home and found herself in Fetter Lane. Still confirmed in her resolution, she walked up the Lane, carrying out her purpose of returning by Holborn and just looking up at his windows as she went by.

So far, so good. Up to this moment, Circumstance had had the control of everything. She was going home. She did no more than look at those two windows on the first floor as she went by. Just the snap in her mind had passed when she might have gone in and had flogged her will to go on and then the shuffling of the cards gave liberty to the sport of Chance.

At the instant of going by, when, so far as Amber was concerned, the matter was settled, Mrs. Rowse came out of the side door with a bag on her arm to do her bit of shopping.

At any other time, she might have just nodded her head with a smile and gone on. At any other time she might never have noticed Amber at all. Now, not only did she see her, she nodded her head and smiled in a beckoning way and, without a moment's consideration, made to come across the road.

Amber stopped. Could she have done otherwise?

"I don't know what's the matter with Mr. Grey, Miss," she began, directly she had reached Amber's side. "But something's the matter with him. I've been workin' for 'im now goin' on four years and a married woman with children of 'er own gets fond of a man—you know what I mean—if 'e's a nice gentleman to work for. And 'e's always been so jolly. If you asked me what 'e did most of 'is day, I'd say laughin' and teasin'—that's what I'd say. Of course, that's 'ow I sees 'im, me doin' a bit o' dustin' and gettin' 'is tea of a mornin' and makin' 'is bed."

"Then what's the matter with him now?" asked Amber, despairing at last of ever getting the facts of the case.

"What's the matter? He's sittin' up there in his room, cryin' 'is eyes out. Not lettin' me see, mind you. 'E wouldn't let me see for nothin'. Pretends 'e's blowin' 'is nose and all that sort o' nonsense.

But I know well enough. He's 'ad a letter this mornin' that's upset 'im. That's what it is. Generally he cuts 'is letters open with a knife. This one 'e tore open with 'is fingers. I don't know what it is. But while I was makin' 'is bed I 'eard 'im in the sittin' room. He must 'a' been cryin' then, 'cos 'e made that noise like an animal you know—a sort of moan and a grunt mixed, like men do when they're cryin'—like as if they'd forgotten 'ow to cry and was ashamed of the silly mess they was makin' of it."

That was enough for Amber. She was across the street and in through the door and up those uncarpeted stairs in a minute.

She knocked at the door, but that was about all she did. Hardly waiting to hear his smothered growl of—"come in"—she entered.

There he was, as she might have imagined he would be from Mrs. Rowse's description, seated in his chair staring with resentment at the door to see who ever the intruder might be. When he saw it was Amber he shrank into himself as one who is fearful of being found out.

She came straight across the room to his side. Down on the floor by the chair she knelt, just as he had done with Jill the day before and straight out, without a moment's pause, she asked him what was the matter.

"How do you know there's anything the matter?" he growled at her.

She declared she was no fool. She lied that she

had just turned in by accident to see him. She added she had the capacity of sight as much as anyone.

"What is it?" she demanded, for if he could growl at her, then assuredly she could bark at him.

He looked her straight in the eyes and he made the face he always put on when he was prepared to show he was as strong as a lion while emotion was making him feel as helpless as a child and he said:

"It's all over, my dear. That's what's the matter. Not love—I don't mean that—but all the rest—it's all over. Her people have interfered—quite rightly too I'm sure. They're a different class—they're a——" He shrugged his shoulders. "They've interfered." He thought it best to stop there.

But it was not sufficient for Amber.

"Still that hasn't anything to do with her," said she. "She's free. She's over twenty-one, isn't she? What's she say to it all?"

He just handed her a letter and in a glance Amber read it through:

"My dear—believe me I shall always love you—but I suppose after all—they're right. God bless you—Jill."

She handed it back in silence and looked into his face.

He smiled—and then he laughed—and then he stared and stared at her and as he stared the tears swam in his eyes, and flowing over, pelted in a torrent down his cheeks.

"Now you've seen a man make an ass of himself," said he and jumping up from his chair, he strode into his bedroom and shut the door.

For a while she waited, standing in the middle of the room, patiently, helplessly. Patient at last no longer and chafing against that helplessness, she went to his door and knocked.

"Is there anything I can do, John?"

He came at once to the door, opened it, entered the room again and took her hand. Something had happened to him in there. All signs of tears were gone. There was a wild look in his eyes, but his voice was steady and firm.

"I don't believe it," he said. "Love doesn't end like that. I don't believe it. They've bullied her into writing that letter. But she doesn't think they're right. One day she'll knock on that door and I shall hear her calling to come in. Love doesn't end like that."

He pressed her hand and a smile, she knew he thought to be full of real conviction, spread over his face. She answered that pressure and turned away. There was more sadness in that convincingly happy smile than she could bear to witness.

"If it matters at all—if you care to," she said, "let me know what happens," and she hurried away.

Chapter XLVIII: *The Sound of Pennies*

IT is the little issues of Life that bring their fret of doubt. When the issue is great enough, doubt has no place or meaning.

Once he had recovered from the first shock of that letter from Jill, John came back to the whole-hearted impulse of his belief. A negative condition of doubt was impossible. One thing he must think, or the other. There was no half-way house. Half the way was a distance, of the length of which his heart knew no measure.

They had coerced her into writing that letter. In that prison of Prince of Wales's Terrace, with its pretentious surroundings of wealth, as pretentious as the castellated turrets, the towers and bastions of Holloway jail, they had tortured her mind to send that message.

It was not that he believed in himself, but because he believed in love and in no half-hearted fashion, that he made so sure of his conviction.

A week went by, a week of silence and, with his eyes growing harder and harder as they looked out upon life with each fresh day, he held to the

truth love had brought him. She cared more for love than the possessions and expediencies of life. They might continue to torture her, but in the end they would see they were torturing her life away and they would have to give in.

All that time Mrs. Rowse did not know what to make of him. He put the fear of God into her, she said, for there was the same look in his eyes as when she felt she had not a stitch to her back and it was distressing, day after day, to come in and out of those rooms in that uncomfortable condition.

At the end of the week she was on the point of giving him notice. Except in making answer to a direct question, he had said no word to her for seven days.

It was more than a body could endure, she informed her husband, and upon being told what a fool she was to take any notice of him beyond doing her work, she decided to bear it for another week.

But the first day of the second week, there was another letter opened as the first had been with a slashing finger. Then she knew that something had happened, because he had changed into his best clothes and in five minutes had been singing at the top of his voice there in the bedroom.

Jill had written, saying: "You must come and see me—here—father wants to see you, too. Come at once—after you get this."

He took a hansom all the way and gave the cabman four shillings.

Of course it would come. It had to come. He knew it would come. The sound of the old horse's hoofs as they rattled along, played all the tunes he had in his head.

He was shown into that same room at the end of the hall. This time there was but one person in it. It was Jill. The instant the door had closed, she was in his arms.

What she said was almost incoherent to him. It was love in all the confusion of words with which she could express it. She begged him to forgive her for that letter she had written and did not wait for the expression of forgiveness, but clung to him and kissed.

Suddenly then she held him at arm's length and said:

"Do you know what's happened?"

He shook his head.

"Poor Mr. Skipwith's died and left all his money to me. Think of it! I'm rich. We shall never be poor again!"

Before he could answer; before he could disentangle one thought out of the confusion of sensations that heaped themselves upon him, the door had opened and Mr. Dealtry had entered.

He came forward with a certain reserved geniality. He held out his hand as though opening the preliminaries of an interview in which, were he satisfied, he was prepared to give John a responsible post in a vast concern to which a really excellent salary was attached.

"I've no doubt this was unexpected for you, Mr.

Grey," he said, "but perhaps Jill has told you already."

He spoke as though the interview which had taken place between them in that very room had never occurred. Feeling that atmosphere again, it was vibrating in John's memory. Mr. Dealtry appeared to have entirely inhibited it from his mind.

"Jill has just told me she has been left some money," he replied, and not only the expression on his face but the tone of his voice were almost comical in their bewilderment.

"One hundred thousand pounds," said Mr. Dealtry, as though he were announcing the capital funds of that vast concern in which it was his intention to offer John a post of responsibility.

"Yes, one hundred thousand pounds we calculate it when the death duties are paid. Quite a nice little sum. My poor friend Skipwith——" his voice dropped to the appropriate tone. It was like an undertaker removing the sad tie of private life and putting on the crêpe of commerce. "My poor friend Skipwith died very suddenly. I hardly realize it myself yet. He was an old friend of mine—many years' standing—we were at Eton and Oxford together—the best of friends and it affects me more deeply than I like to say when I find this expression of his regard for Jill which in some measure, I know, throws light upon the friendship he felt for me. However, let's put that aside for the present—those are my own private feelings and expression makes them neither deeper nor easier to bear."

His voice changed.

"We sent for you, Mr. Grey, because—well—to put it bluntly, Jill has a power now she did not possess before, to demand consideration."

The funeral was over. Mr. Skipwith was decently interred in the cemetery of proper consideration. The crêpe of commerce could be put aside. Almost with relief, the undertaker donned once more the red tie of his emphatic satisfaction with life.

"Apart from all silly sentiment, we know Jill is in love with you. She's told us so. Indeed, the fact that she even wished to marry you when she had this excellent offer of marriage from my friend —you know he had asked her of course—proves conclusively how earnest her affection must have been. I don't want to talk platitudes, but a girl must be very—what shall I say—overcome, if for the sake of a romantic idea, she could refuse an excellent fellow and five thousand a year. However, fortune has not deserted her, and believing that her happiness does lie with you, we sent for you to say that we have no objection now, so long as you will adopt just a little different standpoint in your views of life. Won't you sit down?"

John sat down and Jill, beside him, slipped her hand into his.

"I want to say, first of all, that I've read that poem of yours again and in a different light—for circumstance does change the lighting, doesn't it? I much better appreciate its merits now. I'm not given to over-praise, Mr. Grey, but in the last few days—some things you have written have been a

help to me in this bereavement. I've been reading some of your work, some that Jill had in her bookshelves, and I find a lot of, shall we say, feeling—genuine feeling—in them. I believe you will get on."

He paused. To have said this of any man was a prophetic pronouncement. He gave the words the full value of the silence that followed them, and then he continued:

"Novelists now-a-days," he said, "unlike they were in the days of Johnson and Goldsmith—and—wasn't there a man called—Sterne? Unlike them, novelists have come into Society. They don't have to sit on the doorstep of a patron. I've met novelists, writers, men like yourself, at Stafford House and the Lord Mayor's banquet. Well—that's getting on. It's not the sort of socialistic stuff you talked when you were here before. That, I want to tell you frankly, is what we're afraid of. There are still writers in this country who, metaphorically, have a sort of distaste for a clean shirt. They don't want to get on. They don't affect the clean linen of society. Now I am a believer in the social atmosphere. I hold that as one enters the world, the class in which one finds oneself constitutes a duty to the individual to keep in that class."

For the first time John spoke.

"You don't believe in bettering yourself?" he asked.

"Bettering oneself—why—certainly. A good many novelists and quite a lot of actors have been knighted. Bettering oneself? Why, of course. It gives me hope to hear you say that. Bettering one-

self, certainly, but never falling into a lower class. At present, living where you do, I know you won't think it snobbish of me to say that your environment is scarcely that to which Jill has been accustomed. She has lived here in Prince of Wales's Terrace and, no doubt now with the money she has, will be able to afford a still better address. I will honestly admit, Mr. Grey, that even when Jill knew she was coming into this money, I did not favor you at all as her husband. Money is not everything. It can't make a man what he is not. But when I read that poem of yours again and, as I have told you, some of the books you have written, I saw that there were potentialities in your work, that you had something in you, that in time, with the encouragement of a successful marriage, you might even become one of those novelists who have won a knighthood for themselves. Now-a-days, I know, a knighthood does not mean much, but it does give a distinction, a recognition in the artistic world where I believe, so far as the herald's office goes, all writers, actors, and musicians are still classed as vagabonds. That of course is ridiculous. But the old laws prevail. You mayn't shoot conies in Regent Street, you know. Ha! Ha! Ha! Didn't know that I expect—did you? No—you mayn't shoot conies in Regent Street! Well—I hope I shall never be in such need of a meal as to feel the temptation of breaking the law."

He laughed again and Jill laughed. Her laugh grew chill as she stole a glance at John. Mr. Dealtry noticed nothing. He had never, with so

delicate a subject before him, spoken better in his life. He was anxious to continue.

"I am sure now," said he, "you see more or less what I am aiming at. Candidly you frightened us, my wife and myself, when you were here the other day, and when first Jill said that now she had money of her own and could marry whom she liked, we were a little bit afraid until she assured us she was certain you would see things in a different light when there was plenty of money for you to live upon in comfort."

"You said that, Jill?" asked John quietly.

"Yes—yes. I said I knew it was only because you had to put up with poverty that you talked about the dignity and the humor of it. I know that's how you've helped yourself to get through. I know you like pretty things and comfortable things as well as anyone and that now we've got all this money, you'll—you'll not want to choose your friends amongst—well—the sort of people in Fetter Lane."

"Like Charles Henry Quirk," said John.

"Yes—and the—other man."

"Who, might I ask, is Charles Henry Quirk?" inquired Mr. Dealtry with interest.

"Charles Henry Quirk," replied John, "is a clarionet-player. He plays in the street outside my windows every Friday morning."

"A friend of yours?" repeated Mr. Dealtry, not quite sure of what he had heard.

"Yes, a friend of mine: a man with so fine a distinction between the joy of his work and the re-

muneration for it, that he prefers to make a servant girl cleaning a doorstep sing 'Sally in our Alley' without any profit to himself, to playing outside the houses of the rich where they pay him well to go into the next street."

Mr. Dealtry overcame his astonishment with laughter. Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed.

"Ah, copy, Mr. Grey! Isn't that what you call it? Copy!"

"No, I said friendship," replied John. "He plays outside my window, certainly—but if I lived in Park instead of Fetter Lane, there would always be mornings when I should ask him to come upstairs. He wouldn't take advantage of it."

Mr. Dealtry dismissed the laughter from his face.

"Yes," he interrupted, "I'm glad you've said this. This is just the kind of thing I mean—just the kind of thing we're afraid of. If you marry my daughter, Mr. Grey, you'll have to drop all acquaintances of that character."

"I should," said John. "I should drop them automatically. In the places where people live with an income of five thousand a year, the Charles Henry Quirks never make an appearance. I'm not dogmatic about it. I shouldn't purposely go down to Fetter Lane to bring Mr. Quirk back to dinner in my house in Kensington."

"Your house? Well. You mean Jill's and yours."

"Yes. I mean ours."

"Oh, well, that's all right. Believe me, Mr. Grey,

I'm being intensely sympathetic—very tolerant—very open-minded. As you can imagine, with this money, my daughter could make an excellent match, yet if I find that you are willing to adopt our views of life, I can, seeing that she is in love with you, raise no objections—no drastic objections to her marrying you.".

John dropped Jill's hand and sat up in his chair.

"What exactly do you mean by your views of life? It seems to me vital I should know what they are before I adopt them."

Mr. Dealtry thrust his hands deep into his pockets. It was beginning to occur to him that this young man was not showing the spirit of appreciation due to the situation. Fortune had never come his way to the extent in which it was being flung at this young man's feet. His wife had not brought him five thousand a year, or five hundred. The whole affair and John's attitude into the bargain seemed to savor to him of the domestic servant as she had become; the domestic servant who wants first to know whether the place is going to suit her, not she the place. He began to persuade himself that what John was exhibiting was damned impertinence. After all he was nothing better than an artist. His was not a situation in life where a man could pick and choose.

"While you're inquiring into our views of life," he said with great restraint, "I hope you won't overlook the fact that in marrying my daughter, you will find an entrance to a world very useful to

you in the selling of your books. You will give dinner parties and in turn be entertained, and all amongst a class of people essential to your success. You want to sell your books, I'm sure. The sale of your books, when it goes up, must be a cause for considerable gratification in your mind. All this I hope you won't overlook when you set yourself up to ask what our view of life may be."

"No—I won't overlook it," said John slowly. "How could I? It's partly an expression of your point of view. It's the very kind of thing I'm asking for information about. You don't really expect me to adopt your outlook on life without question, do you?"

Jill quietly took his hand. The underlying strain of the conversation was becoming apparent, more in the quietness of their voices than in what they said.

"John," she said, "father only means that if you have the benefit of the money which I'm so glad and willing that you should, you will give up your present habits of life—this sort of Bohemianism. He only means that you should consider appearances more. You may not like society people, in fact I know you don't. I've often heard you talk about them. But when we're married, it's only right to me that you should appear to get on with them. We shall have to entertain, of course. It would be ridiculous having all this money if we didn't. There's no need for people to think we're poor when we're not. You needn't make your friends amongst

them. Of course, I couldn't have men like Mr. Quirk to the house, though he's very genuine and kind, I'm sure."

"I beg pardon, Jill," interrupted Mr. Dealtry, "but you haven't met this man who plays a clarionet in the street?"

She was taken by surprise. Her glance at John confessed it.

"Where did you meet him?"

"At lunch."

"At lunch! Having a meal with the man! Where was this meal?"

"Wrigglesworth's."

"Wrigglesworth's! Where's that?"

John intervened.

"It's a little eating-house off Holborn," said he.

"And you invited my daughter to meet a street musician in a little eating-house off Holborn?"

"I did."

"Well, Mr. Grey, I think we'd better come to plain speaking. If you're going to marry my daughter, you'll have to behave like a gentleman. That's what all this conversation amounts to. You're getting a fortune with her which, if you'll excuse me saying so after what I've just heard, seems to be a slice of luck you scarcely deserve. Some people are born lucky and I expect you must be. Here you'll have a wife with five thousand a year and such a home as I dare say I'm right in saying you could never have got by your own exertions. Without a stroke of work for it, you'll be

able to go about with everybody thinking you're a rich man."

All through this speech, the gray look of winter had been coming back into John's eyes. He did not respond in anger to the suggestion that he was not a gentleman. It needed, he felt, a gentleman to make that suggestion hurt. What had happened was that between them both, Mr. Dealtry by what he had said, Jill as much by her silence, they had killed his belief. Love did end like this with a frayed and ragged edge—a bedraggled thing one could not recognize for the dainty garment it once had been. Both of them, they were dragging it through the mud before his eyes.

"I just want to say this," said he quietly. "It's Jill I've wanted—not the advantages she could bring me. I hate her money. I couldn't give her anything in return for that. You've made it so plain to me that it stands out to you above everything—it's the commanding factor in this discussion. We began with it. We end with it. One hundred thousand pounds. Now it's yours, you believe it can buy everything."

He turned to Jill.

"You believe it can pay for love, my dear. When you wrote that letter the other day, I never thought it came from your heart. I believed pressure had been brought to bear; that you'd been compelled to write it. But the moment you told me you had been left this money and that now we could marry, that was the first moment I felt love turn its back."

He directed his eyes again to Mr. Dealtry.

"I've no doubt all this sounds the sheerest folly to you, sir. Money makes your life easy. According to you, I should be a lucky man if I married a wife with five thousand a year and, as you say, I ought to make any amount of sacrifices, however sacred to me, to justify and pay for my luck. It's not so much that I think my view of life is the only view or that it's anything wonderful in its way, as that by offering me money for it, you've made me realize how valuable it is to me. I've got an idea about love, that it's beyond a price and in putting a price on it, you have only convinced me the more how much beyond a price it is to me. As I stand here at this moment, I love your daughter—but I love her with my nature, not yours. I love her with the thoughts that are worth something to me—not the thoughts that are worth something to you. I can't help saying this, but I despise the thoughts and ideas that mean something to you, and were I to adopt them I should have nothing left to love her with."

"I suppose you want to suggest," said Mr. Dealtry, "that you can only love her in poverty—not in wealth, and that being the case I don't think you can wonder at my considerable doubt of your sanity."

"Well—it looks as if I would suggest that—doesn't it?" said John. "But I don't. I should have worked hard—terrifically hard to make a good income for her had she married me when I was poor. What's more, I should have done it. Love, when you have it, helps you to win. But she

wouldn't marry me when I was poor. And I don't blame her for that. The thing that's hurt and deadened nearly all the feelings I have is that she has only believed in money to buy us happiness. I know you can't buy it. That's one of the things I know. That's one of the things I believe and I shall go on believing it, even if I make five thousand a year myself."

"Well—I don't know that I want to listen any more to this sort of talk," interrupted Mr. Dealtry. "Mr. Grey doubts your affection for him, Jill. I should have thought you had proved it, pretty plainly. Do you want to say anything more?"

John turned, looking to her to speak. In the long silence that fell about them, she could say nothing. Mr. Dealtry crossed the room and opened the door and, when he had waited beyond the expectant beating of his heart, John walked out.

Suddenly, standing there then, there came to Jill's mind the remembrance of his story of the black-cap in the Zoo and she realized what he had meant when he said that all his feelings had been hurt and deadened. She had opened the window to his singing and she had thrown down her pennies into the street.

So she understood it must be the end because, as she watched him passing down the length of the hall, she did not even see how she could have done anything else.

The hall door closed and Mr. Dealtry turned to Jill.

"Hadn't it ever occurred to you before, my dear, that that young man's a little bit mad?"

And just as before in that atmosphere they had made her doubt her own sanity, so there leapt upon her then a doubt of John's.

Chapter XLIX: *The Rest House*

AMBER waited through the silence of a whole week. On the eighth day, she could bear it no longer. Borrowing twopence from her mother, she took the first 'bus that passed, went down to Holborn, and walked along Fetter Lane.

It was morning. Mrs. Rowse opened the door when she knocked. The whole room was being done out. It was like an auction sale. The furniture was anyhow. Staring with astonishment into the room, Amber realized in a sub-conscious moment how the atmosphere of a place depended upon its occupation.

On that other occasion, she had just seen John leave the house. The room had still been warm with the atmosphere of his presence. Now, although the same furniture was there, the same carpet, the same curtains on the windows, the spirit of John seemed to have gone. With all its furniture the room was empty.

On that other occasion, when she felt all she had been unable to give him, an utter despair had fallen across her heart. But now he was adrift. With the chill and emptiness of that room as now she beheld it, there was something she felt in herself she could give wherever he was, if once she could find him.

"Gone away?" said she, and saying it did not interrupt her thoughts.

"Yes, Miss—went three days ago."

"Where to?"

"Well—'e's left 'is address 'ere—'case there was letters. Said I was to post 'em on."

She fished out a slip of paper from the confusion on his desk and handed it to Amber.

"Jordan's Rest House—Nr. Beaconsfield."

She handed it back to Mrs. Rowse, and paused for one instant wondering whether it would be the proper thing to borrow five shillings from John's woman. A sudden recollection of what Mrs. Rowse knew of her financial transactions induced her to think better of it. She just smiled—nodded her head and said: "I'll write there. I shall remember it," and was gone.

Payne and Welcome's was open. She was wearing a brooch, not another thing of value had she about her. It was the first present she had received from John, a cheap little ornament. Flight of imagination might have called it jewelry. It had been pawned before. Any day of the week it was worth five shillings. Whenever she put it away, it was with no sense of desecration; rather it was a warm feeling of gratitude to the donor, as though John himself had slipped five, fat shillings into her hand. Receiving them over the pawn-office counter, she had always gone out into the street with a whistle on her lips.

She took it out of her blouse as she walked into Payne & Welcome's. Five shillings. It had never

been more, but indignantly she had often refused less.

There was a train at Great Central station that brought her to Beaconsfield within an hour. Then she set out to walk.

For some reason or other, all the way, she sang. There was no conversation in an audible voice now. Something there was she felt now for her to do; not as before when there was everything to avoid.

She had never been conscious of anything she could do for John at any other time. It had been a hap-hazard affair, the companionship they had had together. The whole of her life, indeed, had been like a lot of beads, threaded on a string—a string of chance. That day she had come to him in Fetter Lane and he had told her about his love for Jill, the string had snapped and since then the beads had been lying about on the floor.

It seemed to her, as she looked back on it, that ever since, with that sudden realization of their insecurity, she had been on her knees picking them up and yet had nothing on which to re-thread them.

Now—suddenly—here was a string. She had no idea what sort of a thread it was, but it was something, a purpose on which to hang her beads; something definite amongst all the things in which she had been inadequate, that she could do. It gave a length to her stride as she walked from Beaconsfield station; it made the very ground feel more solid beneath her feet.

And then, when the Rest House itself came in sight from the bottom of that short turn to the left;

when she saw the old Meeting-house, settled down there in the keeping of the beech trees and, as she passed the graves of the Quakers lying so restfully in the grass, her heart began a sudden beating.

John was there. In the stress of his trouble, he had gone there and the utter loneliness of him came the closer to her consciousness when she thought it was the Rest House he had chosen for retreat.

He was hiding. He was like a dog with a sore paw. He was lying in a corner out of the light and she felt she could see him nursing it, dumb and unable to tell any, but one who had a heart to understand, that it hurt.

Almost she ran up the hill. Far louder and more imperatively than she meant to, she knocked on the white door. So imperatively did she knock that the little girl's face was scared when the open door revealed her to Amber.

"Is Mr. Grey in?" she asked.

It was a warm afternoon. The chances were that he was out somewhere walking, somewhere in a corner out of the light.

Another bound her heart gave when the little girl said she had seen him only half an hour ago, seated in the sunken wall-garden.

"Can I go round this way?" asked Amber.

The little girl nodded her head.

He was still there. She could see the top of his head as he sat on the lower level by the side of a tiny pool that is sunk in the middle of the

stone slabs where the saxifrage and the clumps of sweet alyssum grow.

Until she had come down the steps, he did not look up. Evidently it was a last line he was writing. Nothing short of a thunderbolt could have distracted him. She knew that bend of his head. And then she stood in silence, waiting till he had finished. When he raised his head, she saw that he was a man, grown up. Life had driven the child out of him and with the smile of welcome he gave her, she realized that Life had left knowledge in its place. She came and sat beside him on the warm stones. He folded up the paper and looked up into her face.

"I felt you'd come," said he.

She nodded her head.

"Mrs. Rowse told you I was down here."

"Yes."

"How did you manage it?"

"Pawned your brooch."

He smiled.

"What do they give you on it?"

"Five shillings."

He nodded his head as though he recognized the quality of the commercial transaction.

There was a long silence then. He picked a bloom of thrift from a tuft at his side, and with the stalk began to help a water spider over what he imagined was its job on the surface of the pool.

"You've been writing," she said presently.

"Yes."

"What have you done?"

He looked up straight into her eyes as if wondering for an instant would she understand. Then he handed her the paper. It was verse. What he most wanted to write. Verse—at a guinea a time.

Whatever company I take,
  Whatever highway I am shown,
By night-time or at morning-break
  It is my charge to walk alone.

Whatever friend stretch out his hand,
  Whatever love the bolt unbars,
I wander in a foreign land
  Between the furrow and the stars.

Whatever hands shall make my bed,
  Whatever beck'ning voices cry,
The more let me hold up my head
  When I go out alone to die.

So Amber found John in his corner, nursing the wound that Life had given him.

She looked up from the paper on which his lines of verse were scrawled and there were no tears in her eyes. Bright, they were, with a glittering brightness, as though a frost had touched them; but there came no tears to soften or obscure. She knew, as he stood there, he was a child in mind no longer. She knew he had come into a new world and that light in her eyes was a bright, hard fear he had lost the wonder and the joy of everything—a fear that the child in his mind which was gone had taken with it by the hand, the child in his heart. It was a fear that now he was a hard and bitter man.

She held out her hand as she gave the verses back.

"What are you thinking, John?" she asked.

A long, long while he paused before he answered, but there was that sense in the pause, by which she knew he had heard her question and, if she did not speak again, would answer it.

At last he replied.

"I'm thinking," said he, "I'm thinking how plain and certain it is in sudden moments, that we don't belong to this world, yet that all our efforts while we live in it are concentrated in chaining ourselves down to it in a tremulous sort of fear that we're lost if we don't retain our hold. I'm thinking how people surround themselves with possessions which become their only touch with the world they're afraid to leave. I'm thinking how the representation rather than the essence is the secret link we set in the chain; how we buy all that's beautiful in life because we haven't the courage just to realize that it's not our own, but belongs to—well, God, if you like. We're afraid to be alone. That's what it amounts to. And that would be all right, were it not that, in the essential and ultimate scheme of things, we were meant to be alone. Even lovers are meant to be alone. Only in a plan of Nature's do they seem to come together and then, often, the nearer they are together in actual contact, the further they are apart. Lovers are closest perhaps of all when Death separates their bodies. Perhaps that's why lovers are so often glad to die. It's this world that separates lovers—this world and

all the countless tangible representations and appearances that come between them. Once you love, I believe nothing can part you. Death is a link, not a severance. If one dies, the other is nearer than he was before. If they both die—I believe they are so close to each other then, as that scarcely the hand of God could come between them.

"That's what I'm thinking. Perhaps it sounds very depressing; not the sort of talk to give to the people who are hanging on to the world for their realization of life. But I'm alone and I want courage, and I believe courage is only found in looking straight and not out of the corners of your eyes. I may say very different things in a few years' time. But I'm saying what I know now. I may say, what I once remember saying to Jill, that the whole world is a sort of city of beautiful nonsense. All I can say now is, that it is a world and full of the most wonderful reality, only the reality is not in things that happen, or in things we possess. It's in our hearts—or it's nowhere."

He looked up at her and a twisted smile screwed up his lips and his eyes.

"Let's go in and have some lunch," said he. "Let's go in and tell them that we're—Friends. And let's tell them that friends can be together when lover's can't."

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